

4th Infantry Division Task Force Ironhorse



Families Share Deployment Tips from Iraq During Deployment of 4ID and TF Ironhorse

Between January 2003 and April 2004

**Compiled by Bob Babcock
Americans Remembered, Inc.
May 2004
www.americansremembered.org**

**This is not an official publication of the US Army or of the 4th Infantry Division.
Opinions expressed here are not necessarily supported by the US Army or 4ID.
Items included in this document were selected by Bob Babcock from input
submitted by our readers – both military and civilian.**

To Family Members of America's Deployed Military Personnel:

Over the period from the time the 4th Infantry Division and Task Force Ironhorse soldiers were alerted for deployment to Iraq in late January 2002 until their return to the US in March/April 2004, their family members and friends have learned many important lessons in providing support to the soldiers, and to themselves.

Rather than to let those valuable 'family lessons learned' be lost, I asked the readers of my "4ID Update from Iraq" daily email update service to send me their deployment tips so we could compile them into a single document to make available to the families and friends of our fellow soldiers who are in the subsequent waves being deployed to Iraq (and many of these deployment tips are applicable to deployments to Afghanistan or any other place where American troops are put into harm's way).

We will make this "Family Deployment Tips" document available to the Family Readiness Groups (FRG) and rear detachment commanders of the 1st Infantry Division, 1st Cavalry Division, 2nd Infantry Division, 25th Infantry Division, and any other active duty, reserve, or national guard unit that could benefit from what is contained here.

If anyone would like to receive a copy of this document, please send a note to Bob Babcock at babcock224@aol.com and I will be happy to forward it document to you. It is in Microsoft Word format.

This document is provided free of charge and is not authorized to be sold or included in any other commercial venture. It is provided solely as a service to help benefit military families and friends. *Opinions expressed here are not officially sanctioned by anyone in the US Army or 4ID.*

This work was compiled by Bob Babcock, president of Americans Remembered, Inc., an official partner of the Veterans History Project. If you would like to contribute to our non-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation which is dedicated to preserving the memories of America's veterans and home front workers from all our wars, please go to our web page at www.americansremembered.org to learn more about us, to make a contribution, or to volunteer to help us with our work.

This "Family Deployment Tips" document is provided "as is" and without warranty. All recommendations included here should be considered in light of your own personal experiences and needs and used or not used according to your own individual situation. ***Again, this is NOT an official publication of the 4ID or US Army.***

Deeds not Words!

Bob Babcock
May 2004

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
4	Units Represented With Contributions in This Document
5	Some Basics That Everyone Should Consider
11	Mail – Letters and Packages
14	Items to Send To Your Soldiers
24	Communications – Phone and Phone Cards, Email, Video and Voice Recorders
26	Security Considerations – “Loose Lips Sink Ships”
27	Taking Care of Yourself, Dealing with Stress
33	Ideas for Children
35	Redeployment Tips
50	Importance of a Scrapbook and Memorabilia, Preparing for Future Memories
51	Dealing with the Media
53	Financial Considerations

Units Represented With Contributions in This Document

HHC, 4ID
4th MP Company
704th Direct Support Battalion

1-22 Infantry
1-66 Armor
3-66 Armor
4-42 Field Artillery
299th Engineers
4th Forward Support Battalion
Recon, 1st Brigade
HHC, 1st Brigade

2-8 Infantry
1-67 Armor
3-67 Armor
3-16 Field Artillery
588th Engineers
204th Forward Support Battalion
HHC, 2nd Brigade
Recon, 2nd Brigade

1-8 Infantry
1-12 Infantry
1-68 Armor
3-29 Field Artillery
4th Engineers
64th Forward Support Battalion
HHC, 3rd Brigade

1-4 Aviation
2-4 Aviation
124th Signal Battalion
1-44 Air Defense Artillery

173rd Airborne Brigade
244th Engineers
Mississippi National Guard

(plus others who did not designate their unit)

From these units to you and your unit, let us never forget that the Army, and all our military services, are one team and it is our responsibility and duty to help other units in every way that we can.

Some Basics That Everyone Should Consider

Many of the following lessons learned are common sense items, but they can be easily overlooked.

Insure that all paperwork required by the Army is properly filled out prior to deployment. Among these are Next of Kin notification forms, Power of Attorney given to a trusted family member or representative.

ALWAYS insure you have the name, phone number, and email address of the rear detachment commander of your unit and the leader of the Family Readiness Group (FRG) of your unit. They are your primary source of information when you need information or when there is information to be passed out from the unit. Most units will include parents as well as wives on their distribution lists for information (and some also include girl friends, but not all do that).

If your address or phone number or email address changes, ALWAYS insure that the rear detachment commander is informed immediately. They must have that in case your Soldier becomes a casualty.

If you are going to be away from your home or telephone for longer than 24 hours, let someone (next door neighbor, family member) know how to contact you. Again, it is critical that you can be reached in case your Soldier becomes a casualty.

Get Power of Attorney. I didn't have it and several times it would have been a big help.

I was with the 2-22 B Co in 1967-68, and to all the troops that are going to deploy to Iraq, be safe watch your surroundings and trust no one. Also take a camera and if possible try and keep a diary of the things that go on with your outfit and you. This is something I wish I had done, I am now trying to gather things from different sources to fill in the gaps that happened to me in Vietnam. I wish you all a safe tour of duty.

My husband was with 2nd Brigade Reconnaissance Team. During their deployment to Iraq it was very difficult for them to call, and email was never available to them. They were always on the move. I found myself blaming my husband for not calling but you really need to take everything into consideration and realize he will call when he can.

First and foremost, believe Bob's favorite phrase, "No News is Good News because Bad News Travels Fast"!!

Never forget that security is everyone's business. When you put information on the internet or tell people things that they don't need to know, you are potentially endangering your Soldier and the other Soldiers in the combat zone. Also be real careful who you give your Soldier's address to someone, **never** put it on the internet. Never forget the old WWII slogan – "Loose Lips Sink Ships".

Find one reputable source for information and stick with it. Before we found Bob's "4ID Updates from Iraq", we searched and searched for information, and were always trying to piece together information. Having one source helped to make sense out of the big picture.

Find a good map of the country. Most we found didn't include all the little towns you'll hear mentioned on the news. The best one we found at Barnes and Noble and was put out by National Geographic.

My daughter in law became very active with her FRG (Family Readiness Group), attending as many meetings as possible, even training to become a group leader (not so much to BE the leader, but so she was in on the "scoop" before anyone else – smart girl!!!)

I don't know where this will fall in your lessons, but the biggest thing that I learned was that I had to form a tighter bond with my sister-in-law. She was the one given all the information, she got all the calls, everything. Not that I begrudge her any of it. I am proud to say my brother took care of his wife FIRST and the rest of the family second. Because of the relationship with her I knew ahead of time about his R&R, I would get emails about every up and down he had.

I would suggest a separate bank account that is not related in any way to the one your bills come out of. Place money in it every pay period for your soldier to have access via checks and or debit/visa/master card. I can not tell you how many friends of mine found themselves in situations where their spouse wrote a check that was forgotten, or used the ATM card at an inopportune moment and had bills bouncing and a rough time playing catch up. I would suggest placing \$100 to \$200 for your soldier in the account every payday. Phone cards in some areas are outrageous prices for very few precious moments. If your soldier does not use all of the money you two can spend it on their mid-tour leave having a great time!

My husband was in the first Gulf War. We were stationed in Germany at the time. I couldn't go home to mom and wait it out. I had two children, a job, and a house to run while my husband was deployed. He was gone 6 months. I made sure I had a smile on my face when he left. Crying, sobbing, cursing the world, and generally being in a bad mood is not what your husband needs to see as he leaves. He can't spend his time worrying about his family and watch out for himself at the same time.

There is tremendous support available with your Family Readiness/Family Support Groups, your church, base or post chapel, etc, **USE IT and GIVE TO IT.**

Don't get wrapped up in the TV/radio/other news outlets.

Don't believe and don't spread every rumor that comes don't the pike. And remember the old adage "loose lips sink ships".

If you can sneak a letter or card or two into your soldier's bags before they leave, do it. It's nice to find something from your real home when you get to your new home.

And my personal favorite, "Some trust in chariots... but we trust in the Name of the Lord our God"—If He brought you to it, He'll bring you through it.

Keep your unit POC (Point of Contact) informed as to where you are. If you leave the area for more than a day, even with a cell phone, let your unit POC or Rear Detachment, know where you will be and for how long. Be sure to leave a contact phone number.

Military life isn't easy, it has its own language and culture. Some of the things the military does are very frustrating – hurry up and wait, never know what's going on for sure is very common, learn to accept it because that's the way it is. This deployment has been one of the hardest things I've ever gone through. Learning about things, reading and getting support from other military families is what has helped get through it. It's like an emotional roller coaster – you're very proud, but also very scared and feel every emotion in between. You may feel furious with people that don't support the troops, the country, and our president.

Bob, in our ever changing world a lot of soldiers have two sets of parents due to divorce. Many times the four parents are at odds with each other. During your soldier's deployment, if never before, NOW IS THE TIME to put your differences behind and come together for the sake of your soldier. Do what is best for your soldier. Your soldier needs to know how loved they are from ALL of their family. Both families should share news, both families should let their soldier know when they have received news from the other family and both families should share their time with their soldier should they get any R & R back to the States. Like it or not, the reality is their soldier has TWO families. Our brave men and women do not need the added pressures of trying to decide which family to call, write, or visit on R & R. Most important is for them to receive the love and support they need to complete their missions. Any messages or letters from the FRG should be sent out to both families.

Prior to deployment, get your permanent records together. We used a binder, also expandable folders. There are lots of lists out there, and the unit probably already has a Division Family Readiness Guide available with information inside. Information that is absolutely vital is power of attorney (POA), leases or contracts for property, furniture or cars, a current budget (vital!), birth certificates, medical records, ID cards. Sit down and go through all the monthly bills one month, and call each of them to be sure the spouse's name is on the account and she/he is allowed to make changes to the account. I pay all the bills, and my name is even on most of the accounts, but I was unpleasantly surprised to learn that since some of the accounts were established with my husband's name primary, I was unable to make changes, and POA's don't always work. And don't forget orders!

Also prior to deployment, the FRG put out a pre-deployment information guide, explaining to people what our unit did (you'd be surprised how many spouses don't know this), the full deployment mailing address, the rear-detachment phone numbers, the chaplain's phone number, and anything else appropriate for your unit. Our goal with this was to provide a single source for the most important information, readily accessible, and to help our spouses and parents feel better about what was going on. Knowledge is always better than ignorance. In this newsletter, as well as at our pre-deployment briefing, we asked all soldiers to provide the name and email address/phone number for their parents or other concerned family members if they wished. I then included these people on all email newsletters, updates from our troop, and provided them with my phone number so they could ask questions if they needed to. I had huge response from this, so don't forget parents and other relatives who care!

Our troop purchased a digital camera to record the history of the deployment. Officially, these pictures were to record the unit deploying and activities in Iraq. Unofficially, the pictures were a lifeline for us. I created a free website on yahoo (unofficial, of course) to simply load pictures so everyone could see them. We had thousands of hits, and our company only had 67 soldiers. My husband and the 1SG just mailed CDs of pictures when they had a chance. It made a huge difference.

Finally, a few comfort items that can't really be mailed but are worth purchasing before vehicles are shipped: camp cots (high demand for these), hammocks, portable charcoal grills, coolers, camp showers, any high tech camp stuff that makes roughing it easier.

1. Stick to a Budget
2. Attend Family readiness group activities.
3. Don't be afraid to seek the help you need and deserve – whether it's personal or just time to yourself.

Never get discouraged if you do not hear from your soldier, they have a job to do and can not always write, call or email when you want them to (most important, be sure you write often, try to every day, it does not matter what you say, just talk about the weather or anything that pops

into your mind). I know we have become accustomed to email but don't use that as an excuse not to write letters, mail call is an exciting time.

Stay in touch with the unit. Going out of town, make sure you leave a number to be reached. If you live on post, let Housing know you are leaving and when you are returning...this is a RULE. FRG meetings are great. You can meet new people who are in the same spot as you. Your FRG leader will make sure you receive updates in e-mails and phone calls.

Stay occupied with new tasks, goals, and focus on DOING, rather than watching the news.

It is the soldier, not the reporter, Who has given us freedom of the press.
It is the soldier, not the poet, Who has given us freedom of speech.
It is the soldier not the campus organizer Who has given us the freedom to demonstrate
It is the soldier who salutes the flag, Who serves under the flag,
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.

Support our troops.

Explain to your soldier the importance of communicating with you – even if it's no more than an "I am safe" note or email no less than once a week (in most cases they can do that – if they understand how important it is to you). Many soldiers have never written letters in their life. Make sure they understand that now is the time that they learn that skill. You and your family members need to hear from them, just like they need to hear from you.

Don't wait until the end of the deployment months to decide to save money. Start in the beginning and make it a habit to continue sending money to savings. It is a great idea to keep a spreadsheet of all bills paid each month so when your soldier returns, you can hand the spreadsheet over to show how you managed the money during the deployment.

The other thing I have learned is that I only went through the motions of being Patriotic before this deployment. I now KNOW I am patriotic and I know what some of these songs are really about now.

My husband and I kept a special time during the week for prayer at the same hour. Even being on an eight hour difference, we were able to have a prayer time together that really held us close. Our faith is very strong and I believe this time set aside from all other daily obligations helped us feel together. Whether it is quiet prayer time, or reading time, or whatever you choose, there is a real sense of being together when you know exactly what your soldier is doing... and doing it with you.

Our blessing (mixed) was that my husband was allowed to return stateside to continue to his next assignment and continue his career path (I'm sure you are aware of the timelines in officer assignments). It's a mixed blessing because since he has returned, although he's grateful to be home and safe with the family he loves, my husband is always struggling with the fact that his soldiers, his other family, is still in Iraq fighting for their lives. We've lost good friends, and seen them injured, and the feeling of guilt for not being with them never goes away. But the pride continues no matter where we are.

Don't expect much from them, they're busy working. They don't need any additional pressure. Tell them that even just an "I'm OK" is nice to hear.

Don't wait to tell them how much you love them, to hug them or kiss them....DO IT now!

They will call home at some point and be depressed, and say it sucks and they want out of there! Don't let that get you down, they'll get over it.

They may start smoking to cope. Don't worry about it, they can quit when they get home.

Support them & PRAY! and have everyone else that's willing to - pray for our troops, country and leaders.

They and you WILL be changed by this experience. Some bad, some good.

Make sure you have emergency numbers by your phone. Let the school know of the changes in your child's life and to notify you of any grade changes. The Army has counseling for all family members.

What have I learned? I am the mom of a 20 yr. old soldier in Baqubah:

1. Watch the press. News that is in Baqubah is often reported as Baghdad.
2. I have faced my worse fear, losing my child.
3. That my son's view of his mission in Iraq is very different than my views on the war. I learned to keep my opinions to myself – on our President, the war, our continued presence. I was surprised at my son's innocence and his sacrificing for a cause he truly believes in. I supported HIS views at all times.
4. To listen to his near death experiences and act calm. Only because I wanted him to feel he always had someone he could come to.
5. That tapes of sitcoms and TV shows were the best presents I sent. Include the commercials.
6. No news really is good news.
7. That the dining room table really is for outgoing packages only. No food allowed!
8. To appreciate the night sky. I could look at the moon and stars and "talk" to my son around the world.

You will realize that you have more strength than you ever thought you had. Take one month at a time. By the time one month is down, just tell yourself, "I've done one month, I know I can do another." Soon enough you'll be at six months and tell yourself, "I've done six months, I know I can do another six." Keep in mind that God only gives us as much as we can handle. There are times when I felt like, "Okay, God, this is about all I can take," but at the same time thought that maybe He's giving me these extra challenges because He knew I could handle them and spared some other spouses who didn't have the strength to deal with such pitfalls.

Remember to keep a light on in the window until your spouses return.

To the Soldiers: if you have any type of anniversary, birthday, holiday, between the time you leave and the time you get settled please be sneaky - have someone send flowers, deliver a gift, set up a dinner out, etc to your spouse/kids/mom/dad.

Get a passport (right away, they take 6-8 weeks) - you never know when/why you might need it.

Another thing is when he was home for his 2 week R&R we tried to let him have as much time as possible with his wife and kids. We would have liked to have spent more time with him, but we knew they needed the time together more.

Weather: **www.wunderground.com** then put in Iraq and it gives a list of places to see the weather.

From National Geographic – Average Temperatures in Baghdad, Iraq by month: (Average High/Low (Fahrenheit))

January	61/39
February	64/43
March	72/48
April	84/57
May	97/66
June	106/73
July	109/75
August	109/75
September	104/70
October	91/61
November	77/52
December	64/43

Rainfall: 6.1 inches

Time zone differences from the US to Iraq:

Eastern Standard Time +8 hours

Central Standard Time +9 hours

Mountain Standard Time +10 hours

Pacific Standard Time +11 hours

I was told about this site from a fellow wife and thought i would pass it along. I only wish that I would have known about it when my husband first deployed.

<http://www.keepingyoutouch.webpointusa.com/linkframe.asp?wt=Keeping+You+In+Touch&l=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Emilitary%2Dfamilysupport%2Ecom>

Since the war has started we have had 55 soldiers with 14 units/Combat Support Hospitals from Fort Hood, Fort Carson and Fort Polk. I just want everyone to know how important it has been to be able to contact the Rear Detachments and FRG to keep us updated on their units. The families have felt much better knowing that we could get information about their soldier. They sometimes are forgotten because they are just ones or twos from outside of these units. It is really important to somehow get a connection with the main units. So I guess what I am saying is every Medical Hospital/Unit has an FRG or a POC for these families. Some are more active than others. For the upcoming deployments, I encourage the FRG's to try and get a Point Of Contact from these medical facilities by calling their Troop Command office. They in turn should be able to contact the FRG POC.

All in all, when it comes right down to it I have learned that no matter how bad a day I have or how long this year has seemed, thanks to my husband and other men and women like him, I have a wonderful life and I owe it all to the brave soldiers that fight for our freedom.

Mail – Letters and Packages

This section covers general information on mail. Details on suggested items to send and not send are in the next section.

Instead of paying for boxes and tape to send care packages, call or go online to US Postal Service and set up an account. They will deliver supplies to your house for priority mail packages. They will even pre-print the labels with your address and the Soldier's. You can also ask for supplies at your local post office but they prefer if you want several for you to get an account. This is a great money saver and extremely convenient. The web site is www.usps.com or you can call customer service at 1-800-275-8777. (A direct supply order phone number is listed further down in this note). I know this was extremely helpful for me and I wish I would have found out about it sooner than I did.

Care packages....don't send huge ones...rather, send many small ones. They'd much rather receive 4 small packages in a month than one giant one.

Keeping the mail moving to our Soldier was the number one priority for keeping her morale up. We always enjoyed the letters from her, but it was more important that she hear from her family, friends and anyone else that took the time to write. The care packages were better than Christmas she said. Always send enough to share.

The one thing that I did to help on the home front was to send out an update letter to family and friends every time I heard something from her. This helped me by not having to repeat myself so many times to so many people. All of them told me they looked forward to getting them and they in turn forwarded them to people we didn't even know. Because of this our daughter was overwhelmed by the responses she has had. We are looking forward to our daughter's safe return and in turn will be praying for God's protection over the deploying troops.

Pack the packages solid...do not leave room for things to move, shift or crush. Pick the size of the box carefully so that you can fill it evenly. Don't send from manufacturers direct to Soldier if possible...you save on shipping but the company name is all over the box and that makes it a target for theft. Smaller packages every week work better than huge packages every few weeks.

I printed mailing labels for them to mail things to each other and to us.

If you have a large family, take turns sending packages and share lists. Church groups and coworkers and school groups are all willing to send with a little direction and encouragement. Get others involved.

Be careful who you pass the address of your Soldier to. Security should always be utmost in your mind. NEVER pass the name and address out over the internet to someone you do not know – there is no telling who they will forward it on to. There have been problems of massive lists of names and addresses being passed around the internet – you don't want to be a part of that. Don't forget that there are bad people out in the world who want to do harm to our Soldiers in any way that they can. Well meaning "do gooders" may not be your best source of getting mail to your Soldier. Only use trusted and known sources – family, close friends, church groups, school groups, etc. And be sure to tell them the need for security – and to NOT pass the name and address on to anyone else.

About shipping packages: I tried to send 2 packages a week to my son. Because we have to declare everything, I found it very easy to make a notebook of what I sent in each box. I took a small spiral-bound notebook, added the date and everything I put into that box as I was packing it. I also made any personal notes that I wanted in the notebook. After the box was sealed it was easy to write out the declaration form. But, the best thing was, after he returned (for a family

medical emergency) I was able to ask him, did you get this or that, and he would have a story to tell about what they did with this or that. I will add those to the notebook, and have a nice shipping diary to pass on some day. It made the sending of all that stuff much more special and meaningful.

FREE Priority Mail Supplies from the United States Postal Service (USPS). Call 1-800-610-8734. You can obtain mailing labels (wait till you know your soldiers APO address to order these), boxes (#7 is the best size – 12x12, although others are available), packing tape, and customs forms. You can have your care packages packed, customs form completed and be totally READY when you go to the Post Office.

*Post Office gives first class boxes free, they get there faster, but cost a little more to send.

*You have to fill out a customs form for each box you send.

*There are regulations about what you can and can't send. (We ignored some of them)

*Don't give their address out to people you don't know or you don't want to have it. Have people send things through you.

*Keep a journal of calls, what they say. Write on a calendar when you send stuff and what was in the box.

I carried a small notebook with me and when I'd see someone that knows my son I'd ask them to just jot down a little note, and sign their name. Then I'd send them to him. These were people that maybe wouldn't write him a letter, but at least they said hi and he got to hear support from home.

Things my spouse liked: letters daily! I was preoccupied with my children and life stresses, and only got letters out once or twice a week. My Mother in Law, however, had lots of time, and made a daily habit of writing every night and mailing the letters on her way to work. Lots of times they were just ramblings of good memories from the past, but they made a huge difference to him. Lots of the wives in our troop didn't write frequently, or at all, because they said it was just too painful for them. My advice would be find some way to do it, or ask your family to help – it's a real morale booster. (Editor's Note: I will echo that from my days in Vietnam – my mother wrote me every day while I was gone, and it meant a lot to me to always have mail at mail call. My wife wrote regularly but not as often as my mother).

Postcards were very handy for my husband. I have received some of the most beautiful letters from him, but when he was strapped for time and just wanted to jot a quick note to me or family members he would use the postcards. Also, if someone is not a big writer, a 3x5 or 4x6 area can be a little less intimidating than a whole sheet of paper. The post office does sell them with postage, but since there is free mail one could probably get creative and make some on the computer or even just use index cards. Pre-addressing them is also a great idea.

When buying care package items, keep in mind the weight and size of the package will determine how much postage will be needed. Those on a tight budget can pick some of the lighter and smaller items. The dollar store has a wealth of supplies that can be used and left with little expense. Anything the Soldiers receive will be welcomed and will make a huge difference in their morale.

One of the most touching things that happened during our Soldiers' deployment was when a stranger, after hearing that my son was deployed, gave me all of the change (over \$10.00) he had at home to help with postage. If someone offers to help, accept it graciously, as it gives them comfort to know they are supporting the troops. A prayer or note is also very welcome. I taped poems and encouraging notes to the lid of the care packages with the names of those who donated items or letters for the troops.

DON'T give out your Soldier's address to every support group that wants to help Soldiers, it can get passed around online to so many that you didn't even want. Even if these people are well meaning, DON'T give out the address...

Always send a box out 4 weeks before you want it to get there. Christmas boxes sooner.

What I did for my soldier was tell friends and Family to send a box once a month and mail once a week. This keeps spirits up. I wrote letters more than once a week. Dollar store has cheap cards. Always ask about Military discounts. The Post-office can give you a form to fill out to receive free boxes and Custom forms delivered to your home. Save all receipts from the post office.

Buy a dozen or so 'Miss You' cards (unless you're creative and can make them)...when you are busy with the job/house/kids/FRG and don't have time to write a lengthy letter – jot a note in the card and send it off to your Soldier. It will make their day as much as a 4 page letter!

Pre-address envelopes to your Soldier's APO address so they are ready when you finish your letter.

Send a picture of your family to them, and other pictures of life in US.

When my daughter's boyfriend went to Iraq, I decided to write him letters. I scanned photos on the back of white typing paper and wrote the letter on the other side. I scanned photos of her at all ages and some current photos of her on vacation, on Christmas day and when she was a bridesmaid at her best friend's wedding. Whenever I hear from him he always mentions my "stationary" and he especially likes the silly pictures of her. His favorite was her in braces and ponytails. He said his buddies have gotten a kick out of seeing them as well. She has been a real sport for letting me send the embarrassing photos, but it has been fun for all of us. I have been able to send letters three times a week and even though I don't have anything much to say, he has loved getting the pictures. I guess what I have learned this year is to do things that help your soldier smile. That seems to be the most appreciated.

Packages: Get free shipping materials from the USPS delivered to your door. Boxes, tape, and labels. The US Postal Service is offering free boxes, tape and preprinted custom labels delivered to your home. The post office is trying to do their part to help out spouses of those deployed. All you need to do is call 1-800-610-8734 press option 1 for English or 2 for Spanish and then 1 again and enter your phone number then it will transfer you to a person and just ask how to get free boxes and labels for overseas military. They will send them to your home in 10 to 14 days. There are a few sizes to choose from and come in a bundle of 25. There are 12x12x12 and also 6x6x7 boxes.

The most important lesson that we learned while my son is Iraq: To write him daily and send him care packages. If you don't write a letter daily, send a card. There are nice cards out there. When we sent care packages we always sent him a note and a stuffed animal. We found out the stuffed animal we sent him, he carried with him on his mission. He told us that he felt that they reminded him that his parents were there with him on his mission and watching over him with their prayers. When we write our loved ones or talk to them, tell them good things that are going on, never anything negative. They are in a war zone and they need to know things back home are going fine. (Editor's Note: There are times when you need to tell them about bad things – and don't feel bad about doing that. They need to know about problems such as deaths and family problems that they can help solve, but not every small problem that comes up. Don't let them come home to a lot of problems that have built up over the year they've been gone).

Items to Send to Our Soldiers

This is a long list, some will apply to you, some will not. Know your Soldier and listen to them to fit their personality, likes, and needs. Be creative, surprise them. Focus on how important mail call is to them. As a former Soldier myself, I always smiled when I had mail or packages at mail call, and was always slightly let down on the few occasions when I did not have anything. Even with email as a daily link to your Soldier in many cases, old fashioned letters and packages are still very much desired. And don't forget – the conditions in Iraq today are much improved from what they were when the 4ID and TF Ironhorse first deployed in April 2003. Some of the recommended items may no longer be needed to be sent from home, check with your Soldier to confirm if in doubt.

Whenever possible, think about the other Soldiers in your Soldier's unit and send enough things to share, at least on occasion.

Food Items

You can't go wrong with ramen noodles and beef jerky...

Send food that is easy for them to carry and eat. Granola bar type things are great. "Real" food, like baked beans, make a great break from MRE's.

in talking to my son, he said the BEST box of goodies I sent him was one with flour tortillas, canned chicken, salsa, canned refried beans, and cheese salsa. He raved about that one! Gevalia coffee was another item he loved, especially since it is much better than the mess hall's! At Christmastime, he had to trade homemade goodies with his buddies for summer sausage, which I NEGLECTED sending him. I think that was my worst mistake...!!!!... !!! I vacuum wrapped his favorite dessert, gumbo bars, and sent several boxes of those. Peanut clusters, I sent in December, and I'm afraid those brought thoughts of home to him, in a land that wasn't too "Christmassy." It really made him think about what he was missing at home. He still was appreciative, though.

As to food – can't send anything with chocolate during the summer months, melts too easily- we sent loads of chap stick, citronella candles, and mosquito repellent during those summer months – also a big beach size bath towel and dry laundry detergent - apparently the towels they get to take showers with are very tiny and not very soft.. Lots of Gatorade and other powdered mix that they can add to their water for a change of pace. Trail mix- dried fruit-clif bars- breakfast bars...

We have sent care packages on a weekly basis ever since he was mobilized (he is a reservist) and was still at Ft. Carson. The one thing he and the others in his unit have commented on every time I have sent them is homemade cookies. I have sent many store bought goodies and health care items, magazines, newspapers and pictures but every time I have sent something homemade I have gotten a big thank you from him. I always wrap the cookies individually so they can take them and run if need be, and it is more sanitary that way too.

My family all made homemade cookies and brownies to him which he enjoyed. He kept asking for those lunchables of turkey salad and tuna salad (comes with the meat in a can, mayonnaise, relish & crackers), he also enjoyed peanut butter, crackers, Ramen noodles, Chips, dips, Peanuts (mixed nuts), Kool-aid, lemonade, herbal teas, coffee in tea bags, sugar and powdered flavor creamer for his coffee.

My son was most appreciative of – Salsa (a real "New Mexican" tradition" and chips , and - once they had a microwave oven – Kraft microwaveable macaroni and cheese! (he said it was really

hard to make mac and cheese it before the microwave). Also, surprise food packages from family and friends – I am sure if he didn't like something, there was another soldier glad to have it.

My husband's favorite food item I sent him was canned chicken. They love it and it goes with everything. If your husband does not have a dining facility, protein items are a big thing to send such as power bars and peanut butter, etc.

Rice Krispy treats, jerky, jerky, and more jerky, spices that your soldier likes (Lawry's, risb seasoning), lemonade and kool aid and risbees (for the hot months – look for dry risbees), junk food, microwave popcorn (now that he has one).

What not to send: We sent some of those little packages of cheese and breadsticks that you dip and the cheese got too hot and exploded resulting in a stttinky package!

A vacuum sealer and all sizes of bags is a necessity. Most things get there in good shape. Send lots of drink mixes and stuff to mix with the icky water.

Tell your soldiers the ice over there will make them sick too....even the melted ice around the mouth of the cans!

Powdered Drink mix...Country Time Lemonade worked the best to cover the taste of the water they had to drink, but the powdered Gatorade was good too and helped to keep electrolytes up in the extreme summer heat.

Powdered drink mixes of all kinds and all sorts of "snack stuff", as well as the foil-packed beef, chicken, and tuna are great to send (and great to swap- the guys barter and trade like kids on a playground).

Food: Beef Jerky, foil packets of tuna and chicken (both plain and flavored), crackers, BREAD and SANDWICH meat or peanut butter were wonderful treats. There are recipes of honey cake that used to be shipped from Europe back before express delivery was available that can make the trip and not spoil. Cheese crackers with peanut butter or cheese. Individual servings are wonderful to share or to store because you eat less and then they don't attract the bugs. Also individual packages of things like mayonnaise and coffee cream for indulging.

Water based beverage mixes: large containers of Gatorade, Kool-Aid, and instant tea mix (mostly in berry flavors). The citrus flavors got an off-taste in the heat because they aren't refrigerated.

Favorite foods–Boboli pizza crusts and pizza sauce (Boboli brand sauce comes in plastic envelopes for individual servings and you don't have to worry about not being able to refrigerate after opening), parmesan cheese, pepperoni, canned olives, anything you can think of to throw on a pizza. I did not send pepperoni when it was 130 degrees! His other favorite was tortillas, refried beans, Tostitos, cheese sauce (like a salsa dip), and hot sauce.

Ramen noodles were the most often requested item.

Do not send Chocolate in care packages in the summer!!! Oh what a mess that turned out to be.

NO FRESH FRUIT OR OBVIOUS PORK ITEMS

Vienna Sausages

Crackers

Lunch Packs (chicken salad w/Crackers)

Cheese (squeeze bottles or hard cheese in winter)

Jelly, Jam, or honey (squeeze bottles or individual packets)

TicTacs, gum, hard candy
Coffee and Tea Bags, Cocoa Mix (individual), Cider, Koolaid, Gatorade
Sugar, Salt & Pepper, Creamer (packets)
Pepper Sauce or Canned Peppers
Spices (I sent dried red pepper)
Frosting (tubes or tubs), Sprinkles
Zip Lock Bags (I put each item in a bag, bags can be reused for many things)
Popcorn/Carmel Corn (popped, cans are great and can be reused)
Soup (individual ready-to-heat and eat)
Shelf Meals (beef stew, roast beef and mashed potatoes, dressing, lasagna, etc)
Tuna & Chicken Packets
Mustard, Ketchup, Mayonnaise (individual packets or squeeze bottles)
"Almost Pie" (canned pie filling and cans of Butter Cookies to dip)
Canned Tamales (my son was born and raised in San Antonio so this is a staple)
Pop tarts
Shoestring Potatoes (like French fries when dipped in ketchup)
Potato Chips/Fritos/Doritos (Tubes mail easily, but have sent individual bags also)
Salsa or Queso Bowls
Peanut Butter (Squeeze Tube)
Beef Jerky
Dried Fruit (Raisins, Apples, Banana Chips, etc)
Nuts/Corn Nuts/Trail Mix
Seasonal Items (I sent 10 dozen candy canes and they used them for their Christmas tree)
Chocolate (pack in center of box in zip lock bag to prevent melting)

Also, they only get 2 meals a day so they should send them lots of food and goodies in cans (anything that can stay on a shelf longer than a month) like tuna or soup, etc. On average it takes about 4 weeks for our packages to reach him and everyone grows impatient, but have faith, it will get there. Unfortunately, they also have a mouse problem where he is so in every package I mail lots of mouse traps. Apparently they like to chew through the cardboard boxes of goodies and eat them as well. So when sending food, make sure to put Tupperware in their packages, or tin cans.

When mailing food packages, buy the prepackaged, vacuum sealed, packs of salmon, chicken, etc. It saves lots of \$ when shipping, compared to the canned food items, is easily transported, and gains big points with soldiers when relying on MRE most of the time.

Jerky and ramen noodles.

Don't send chocolate in care packages during the summer months, what a mess.

The soldiers really enjoyed sausage and crackers. Nutella spread went great on top of homemade peanut butter cookies.

Taco Bell in a box was the ultimate in my son's eyes. Buy prepackaged pre-cooked taco meat and plastic bottles of salsa and the Tex Mex will soothe the soldiers palate.

He also requests a lot of Ramon noodle soup, tuna fish, wheat thins and ground Dunk'n Donuts coffee.

Non-Food Items

This is the other item I sent him, which he appreciated when the weather became cold and rainy. I ordered thermo knit underwear from Lands' End in black. They came in pretty handy while he had patrol duty—kept him dry and warm. The funny thing is, when I told him I was sending them, he hesitated, and said that the army provided him with some. Later, I found out he thought I was talking about red long johns, like he used to wear for Christmas pj's when he was little.

Comforter for his cot (twin bed size from overstock.com 50 bucks) I also sent a duvet cover (I washed it before it went over so it smelled nice) with it to make it easier to keep clean, during the cold months he said it has made a huge difference in getting a decent nights sleep not so helpful during the hot summer months.

Sent him a talking photo album – at Sharper Image and Bed Bath and Beyond they sell various size talking photo albums (24 pics-36-pics and 96 pics) I sent this to all our relatives and his friends (since we are spread out all over the country) and everyone included a picture with a 12 second message – (for each picture slot you can record a 12 second message – he loved it – and also pretty much all the participants loved being a part of it! Said when he gets homesick he plays the messages that everyone recorded.

He was quite thankful to have a digital camera – we had to upgrade the memory halfway through his deployment so I would suggest sending them with the largest memory card you can afford

Get a subscription to time magazine or US news and world report for the year of deployment- they like to have news and said books took too long to read but magazines were just right – much cheaper to get a year subscription to whatever magazine your soldier might like than buying it weekly or monthly from your local seller.

DVDs of any sort were appreciated.

We sent our son a pinata for his birthday...it was a great fun thing for him. He sent pictures back and it looked like all the guys enjoyed the fun. A silly thing for a 23 yr old man, but fun nonetheless!

My father is more of a talker then a letter writer so we sent our son and gave my father little Dictaphones which run on AA batteries. The two of them correspond that way which is great fun for them both since otherwise my father would have sent maybe 3 letters during the yearlong deployment- you can get them very inexpensively at Staples or Wal-Mart. Gave him a zip lock to keep his in so it doesn't get sandy!!—the zip locks in all sizes are also a great thing to have available because there is so much dust and sand always blowing around Iraq~!

Some items he liked getting were the snacks of course! But especially the powdered Koolaid and Gatorade to mix with their water. He also liked getting new socks – after a couple months his got holes in them! One thing we did (which I got the idea from one of your updates) was get a 100 piece puzzle and hand out pieces to friends and family. They signed the back and sent a note along with it and I my son got 100 pieces of mail!! The people from our church especially liked being a part of this. The last thing is get names of the guys in the squad and send them letters and packages. We loved being able to brighten the day for others besides our son and his buddies really appreciated it! Then our son was able to talk to us more about specific people and we felt a connection.

My soldier really appreciated each of the care packages me and my family sent. My father mailed him a laptop with DVD player and a few DVD's which he enjoyed it only lasted like 5 months because all the dirt but he enjoyed it. He also enjoyed his MP3 player and Game Boy advance I sent him., paper stationery, pens, envelopes, big enough envelopes to mail letters people wrote to him to mail back to me so I could keep them safe. Disposable cameras and envelopes to mail them back to me in. Granola bars, Long John's for the cold weather, extra of the brown t-shirts

and black socks. He had me send him his winter boots for the cold weather also those military standard pillows 2 of them, newspapers, magazines, paper back books, cross word puzzles, comics books etc..

I also sent my husband an IPOD which is like a MP3 Player but better. You can download thousands of songs onto it. He absolutely loves it. Make sure they have lots of work out clothes and a good pair of tennis shoes. My husband found that during his spare time he continuously worked out.

Some of the items we've included that he enjoyed: a golf club and balls, lawn darts, socks, socks, and more socks, underwear (dark!!!), pillows.

Don't spend tons of money on electronics....the 35mm camera we bought him before he left soon filled w/ sand and the zoom didn't work. He says disposables worked just as well. **Always remember that the majority of what you send him will NOT come back with him.**

Letters.....send letters. They don't have to be novels. Just make them frequent.

Pictures!!!! Get people who maybe went to school with him to send pictures and notes too. We had so many people ask "what can we send" and we told them always – just letters of encouragement and pictures!

Magazines, local newspapers, books

No bar soap in packages with food ... it melts in the package or flavors everything due to the extreme heat. Shower gel and baby wipes, and waterless cleaner were big items. The bag showers were okay but the electric pump showers we sent once they had power and water were the best until they actually got showers.

I also learned to send packages to both him and her. In packages to my brother I would go to Hallmark and buy several \$.99 "love" cards. He was sending whatever cards he could find to her. I even sent him a bunch of lovey stickers. My sister-in-law called me to let me know that somehow my brother had gotten lovey stickers in Iraq and had COVERED an envelope with them for her. She loved it. When she found out it was me – from him – she fell apart. She could not believe that I had thought of that for him.

Things he really appreciated: (He appreciated everything – little things were major to them. Things we take for granted).

1. Sunglasses from his sister that were donated for all the troops.
2. Cracker Jacks, Pace Picante Sauce, Doritos, magazines about cars or their particular interest/hobby, crossword puzzles, CD's, pictures from home.
3. He came home for R&R so he went back with a portable DVD player to watch movies and we bought plenty of movies. I sent him back with Christmas cartoons, such as Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer, Charlie Brown Christmas, Frosty the Snowman (and he said so many of the soldiers gathered around at Christmas thinking of their childhood days when they watched the cartoons).
4. Baby wipes, q-tips, chap stick, eye drops, socks, underwear.
5. Calling cards, disposable cameras. Film for cameras.
6. Most of all **prayers** from everyone and for family members back home....stay close to your faith and stand on that belief that your loved one will be safe and come home to you safely. When anyone asks what they can do, **simply ask them to pray for your soldier.** They need prayers and we do too, to get through this.

The items that he most appreciated in his care packages were: a bed pillow, a warm blanket, movies, any and all snack foods.

Lots of disposable cameras. Pictures of him keep you sane!

The one item we learned was of great need to many (especially single soldiers with families no where near a base) because the mini shops in the outer camps did not carry them, were the leather piece that goes on their head, under their helmets. It wears out in a couple of months in the heat. I sent my husband a few every month when we learned of the need so that anyone without access could have one.

She enjoyed the "fun" things as much as the needed things. At Halloween the risbe filled with candy was a huge success as they blindfolded themselves and hit at it. All of the holidays were important to remember them because those are the hardest times for them when they miss family and friends. The things she enjoyed the most were the photos from home (I kept a disposable camera with me all the time and when I saw something/someone I thought she would enjoy seeing, I snapped it), thermal underwear, a coffee pot, hot plate, and DVDs.

Extra pillows/pillow cases, wipes, and chap stick.

I want to talk about something I learned dealing with Christmas decorations. My husband had a lot of people sending him food and stuff and he had asked a few people to send him Christmas decorations for him and his soldiers. Because we felt that this was being done by these other people I did not send any decorations and Christmas came and went with out any. My husband had maintained a great attitude the whole time he has been gone but a few weeks out before Christmas it really hit home that they had nothing to look at and feel like home. By this time, it was too late for me to send anything and I felt so bad for him. He was really down about this. So what I tell people, don't assume that things will get done when it comes to really important things like that. Do it yourself, do it early so they can hang up for awhile. I will never forget how sad he sounded when he told me that the boxes of decorations had not came in.

One thing that my husband likes to receive is Postcards from friends and family when they travel. Any time we travel to a town, state or another country he receives a postcard from that area. He in turn made a wall of postcards at his location. A little change in I.

The list I was given in the beginning before they left was nothing like the things they wanted after they got there. They bought their own camelback bags but never thought to take cleaning kits. They needed different shoulder holsters for their pistols because of the heat and body armor. They needed something to do to pass the time since they couldn't sightsee around town or visit each other so they bought a portable DVD player and MP3 players. They found web sites to send them LOTS of books and set up libraries for the different camps. They asked for magazines so they would know what was going on in the world and others to feed their minds. They needed battery operated speakers so groups could enjoy music together. My daughter wanted sheets and a pillow (real one) and pillow case for her cot. They took one pair of WhileyX goggle/glasses and found they each needed one in the sandstorms in Kuwait. The sand blasts the lens so they asked for several spare sets. The Army issue goggles don't block the sand and it hurts in the eyes.

The electronic toys that were sent there are amazing. The sand is terrible: it is very fine and seeps into everything. Lots of zip lock bags and sealable boxes. The climate ate floppy drives and tapes. CD ROMs were better once they left Kuwait and moved north toward Tikrit. Cameras are a huge item including access to flash drives and CD ROMs for storage. If items are kept on the person, then hard drive MP3 Players are great because they have fewer moving parts. Theft is a problem, even between soldiers.

Many movies and music CDs appeared weekly there for the soldiers to trade and share. Some were played on portable DVD players and some on notebook computers. I went one step further and bought a DVD recorder with a hard drive for us here. I tape TV shows and fill two DVDs per week (12 hours) for the soldiers to watch and share. I tape prime time weekly shows they ask for as well as educational shows and special events.

I sent picture disks and a few photos of their pets and our family parties.

My husband appreciated the food I sent him the most. He said sometimes the guys forgot to take him to chow. I also sent him the new Game Boy Advance SP, and a few games. The one I think he loved the most was the plaster of Paris handprint that our three year old son made, and I painted, that was his Christmas present. I also sent colored pencils, a sketch pad, books, a notebook. He appreciated those as well.

My son really appreciated a pillow. I got a soft, squishy down pillow (small size) so he could shove it in a ruck sack if needed.

Electronics—portable DVD player, walkman, DVDs, CDs, etc.

MUSIC soothes the heart. My soldier has enjoyed music CDs I have burned for him. As I heard songs on the radio that had a special meaning to us, I copied down the title of the song. After I collected about 16-20 of these, friends helped me collect the songs and get them burned on a CD. I made printed covers and song title lists on the computer. In addition to this, I decorated the cover with my rubber stamps (I'm a stamper!). My soldier has really enjoyed this...from a sentimental side, a humorous side (the Man Song, etc.) and from the fact that it gives him something peaceful and tranquil to listen to...rather than the generator outside his 'container' or the weapons fire! To date, he's received three volumes of 'Love Songs' and says he listens to one every night!

Also popular with the troops were time occupying things: books (all kinds), computer games, Game Boy, even little electronic travel games, silly party favors (rubiks cube, bubbles, water guns), anything to bring a little fun to the dreariness. All kinds of snacks, eye drops, chap stick, lotions, bug spray (any kind you can get there). Current magazines were also a hit. My aunt sent lots of Sports Illustrated swimsuit magazines, which were very popular and didn't come under the mail restrictions.

I went to the local Family Dollar store and got boxes of assorted greeting cards. I think there were about 20 cards in each box, thank you cards, birthday cards, anniversary cards, sympathy cards etc. They weren't nice Hallmark cards but I thought it would give them something to send anyway. Another thing that I sent was some hand held computer games. I got a deal with my credit card statement that I could order them for \$3.00 each. I got the limit on those and I understand they were really enjoyed. Also, I sent a football, frisbee, wiffle ball and bat and a bunch of other toys. The reply I heard after those arrived was, "You should see the bunch of grown men running around like little kids"! It doesn't get any better than that.

Our daughter-in-law mailed our son a digital camcorder for his birthday in July. Since then they have exchanged videos and we've seen a couple of them. It's amazing to hear his voice and watch him as he explains about the Iraqi culture, the troops living quarters and some of the nationals. It's been comforting for us to see how he is living and feel his personality come through as his company jokes and goes about their daily routine. A wonderful idea.

Of all the things I have sent to him over the past year, what he loved the most were pictures, snapshots of us at home doing whatever we were doing. Every time I sent pictures he would always respond by saying – "SEND MORE". So my best advice is to get that camera out and keep snapping!

Kind of a higher end item, my parents got him a portable DVD player to take with. It helped him relax when the free time came along.

NO FLAMMABLE ITEMS

Pillow Case (may be autographed by friends)
Egg Crate Cot Mattress (green or beige)
Mosquito Net (for Cot, found these at Academy Sports)
Camp Shower (Academy Sports has several selections)
Fly Swatter & Fly Paper Packets/Citronella Buckets
Mouse traps (Rat Traps?) (Need to be sure post office knows about these as they could look like something else if x-rayed, no problem otherwise)
Particle Masks (great for dusty days)
Cameras, Disposable
Coleman Rechargeable Fan/Radio/Spotlight/Fluorescent Light)
Personal Water Bottle Fan w/Batteries
Can Opener
Toilet Paper/Q-Tips/Individual Kleenex Packets/Panty Liners (they use these to keep sweat from pouring out of their hats and for personal hygiene)
Baby Wipes (everything from large top dispensers to individual packets)
Bug Repellent (individual packets work best)
Bug Bracelets (Academy Sports) **DO NOT USE PET FLEA COLLARS**
Nylon Knee-High Stockings (helps prevent blisters, flea bites)
Paint Brush, Polish Cloths, Plain Cotton Dish Towels (small, for cleaning weapon)
Plastic Bowls or Basin
Laundry Soap (do not send in food packages as it will transfer flavor)
Shaving Brush/Shaving Soap/Shaving Cream/Disposal Razors/Magnetic Shaving Mirror
Plastic Spoons, Forks, Knives or inexpensive metal flatware (MREs only have a spoon)
Plastic Storage Jars (fill with goodies, jars can be reused for storage)
Washcloths and Small Towels (I washed mine so they would smell like home)
Bar Soap (or liquid soap)
Toothpaste/Floss/Toothbrushes
Anti-Fog Glasses Cleaner (small bottle or packets)
Clothesline w/Clothespins
Boot Laces (72" Tan)
Birthday Candles (a little celebration is great for morale)
Paper Towels, Plastic Wrap, Disposal Tablecloths (bright, seasonal)
Music CDs, DVDs
Games, Books, Magazines (no pornographic material)
Sunday Comics & Political Jokes
Thermometer
Car Deodorizer (great for dorms or to freshen troop carriers)
Toys for soldiers and Iraqi children (Dollar Store has huge selection for very little cash, I sent yoyos, gliders, frisbees, playing cards, high bounce or rubber balls, etc) These can be given to either sex and are non-religious or political, great for winning hearts and minds)
Batteries (C, D, AA, AAA)
Camp Laundry Net, Safety Pins, Scissors

First Aid

Kaopectate Tablets
Tums
Pepto Bismol Tablets
Band aids and Ace Bandages/Gauze Pads/Tape

Eye Drops/Ear Drops/Saline Nose Spray

Vitamins

Antibiotic Cream

Anti-Itch Spray

Motrin (small bottle or individual packets)

These items are for small emergencies only.

Writing Supplies

Writing Tablets

Pens and Markers (for signs, etc)

Scotch Tape

Stapler

Scissors

Printed Return Labels w/Soldier's Address, Printed Labels w/address for Family Members

Seasonal Cards to mail to friends/family (birthday, anniversary, Christmas, Valentines)

It is a good idea to send enough to share when possible. Let the soldiers know you care about all of them.

Lozenges, they said their mouths get dry over there. Baby wipes – sand is atrocious, games, crossword puzzles, pictures from home, news clippings from home, etc....Things they can't readily get there...

These are some of the things my son liked for me to send. They need powdered gator aide, razors, deodorant, soap,(my son likes the Old Spice High Endurance body wash and could be used as shampoo), shaving cream, lotion, wet wipes, twizler liquoris, beef jerky, gum, hard candy, chips that are in the canisters, magazines, books, toothpaste, any kind of snack crackers or any snack in the boxes. My son also had sinus problems and needed sinus nose spray. They need letters. I wrote my son every other day. He said that helped him the most to get through. My daughter-in-law is making him a photo album to take with him so he will have the pictures of his family to look at.

A little Christmas tree in box lets them have a little piece of home. Gag gifts, water guns and zip lock bags to keep sand out of things. Spencer's in mall had lots of fun gifts.

I thought of a few things:

1. Audio tape – amazing. Felt funny at first, but it got to the point it really felt like I was talking to my Soldier.
2. Video camera- he got a chance to get some wonderful footage. Eased my mind a little knowing what his living conditions were like, and seeing where he slept. Also, it was great both getting to hear and see him talk to me!
3. Wet One's wet wipes (they are citrus scented so he doesn't smell like a baby), chemical cooling packs, he used them for "air conditioning" (like they use on little kids who sprain an ankle at school), pillow, perfume, or something that smells like home.

This is an idea that I have used for my wife while she has been deployed. I have a cologne that she loves. So for our anniversary I sent her a bottle of it so she could smell my fragrance out there. She says that it has helped her so often on those days and nights when she misses me. She smells the cologne and it almost feels like I am in the room. This idea also works for ladies with husbands, just send your husband's favorite perfume that you wear. In addition you can spray some pillow cases and seal them in several Ziploc bags to mail to your soldier. The pillow cases hold the fragrance really well and it gives them a feeling of home. This idea also works to just wash them in your usual detergent and fabric softener, then the cases smell like home.

Make mini cassette recordings of new babies gurgles and such and send with a recorder. My son loved hearing his baby's squeals and played them for his platoon with pride. I also sent a little book for him to read out loud and tape for his son to hear his voice.

Send silly jokes and what not's to amuse. My son loved the jokes I printed off and sent and the guys all share.

All time favorite thing I sent him was the air mattress and pump. He will leave it behind for someone else to enjoy.

I learned from our son when he was home on R&R just how much the everyday pictures from home meant to him. I took a picture of his bed and he said he looked at that picture over and over again trying to imagine that he was sleeping on his pillow top instead of his cot.

Some good tips to tell family members for their loved ones going to Iraq is send them lots of baby wipes. My fiancée just recently got running water to take showers but still uses the outhouses to go to the bathroom. They also love receiving playing cards, games, computer games, things to occupy them in their down time. They love getting movies on DVD and have movie night every Wednesday and Saturday night.

Baby wipes, Baby Wipes, and more Baby Wipes! You have to keep in mind that when our fellows and gals went over, it was much more as pioneers. There was little running water, they lived without any of the comforts of home. My son's compound is located in one of the palaces.....they recently got a microwave so he has asked for microwave popcorn and hot chocolate mix. He gobbles up the chef-boy-r-crappy meals.....spaghettios, lasagna, beef-a-roni! And I also have been sending him canned fruit (fruit was on the list of no-no's to send) but I don't put it on the customs form. That is the only fruit he gets. At first we sent all sorts of toiletries, and they were inundated with them so they kept the "extras" in a communal box for people to take as they needed. So I would start out with the toiletries, deodorant, toothpaste & brush, shampoo, soap (although everything tastes like soap that is in the box).....lip balm, especially when it starts to get hot again. Foot powder, new boxers, skin lotion and eventually suntan lotion...bug spray. I hope this helps. Also, we sent him paper, envelopes and pens...they get "free" mail when sending letters. Magazines and photos of us any time we got new ones. I am sure I will think of more, but for now this should help for all the new timers. Wow, what lessons I have learned. We are not a military family so this was ALL brand new to us. Good luck and know that we will be praying for all the soldiers, new and old!

Communications – Letters, Phone and Phone Cards, Email, Video and Voice Recorders

Print and keep the email messages you receive from your Soldier, add them to your scrapbook. They will be as valuable to him/her in the future as will the letters they send home. Although they don't seem too important to save now, this new form of communications needs to be preserved.

Last but not least, let your soldier know you love him and say the words, just don't say you know I love you, say-" I love you and I pray for you daily." I found out that it meant a lot to my son because he knew we love him but in this time he needed to hear it more than ever.

Communicate with the deployed soldier, mail, e-mail, phone cards (Sam's club phone cards best for AT &T phones) Best rate overall- Segovia – 5 cents/ min offered at only some places.

Mail in any shape or form – my mother is a high school principal and one of her good friends is an elementary school teacher's aid. They had the elementary school kids send letters once every 2 months and there were enough to spread out among the troops who did not get mail, something that was really appreciated by the troops. They had the high school kids make up t-shirts for the company my brother commands – they had named everything Hammer so the art students made up t-shirt's, got a local store to donate the t-shirts. They sent over enough for all of his troops--- they all loved their t-shirts and the kids really enjoyed doing something. So, if you have access to any group of young people these were great ways to get them involved - the guys all mailed back thank you notes to the kids and that really excited them!

He always wanted a detailed report on any family affair he missed while gone and he missed 3 weddings besides the annual holidays – at first we sort of felt bad saying we had a really great time etc... but he said he expected us to and wanted to hear all about it. So after that we provided him with all the dirt and attempted to make a DVD of as many of the gatherings as possible – and sent them to him – he really enjoyed them – even as badly filmed as they were.

We focus on taking care of their father and his soldiers by writing letters on a regular basis and putting together care packages for their father with extras for sharing. We include little things that he can give to any Iraqi children he might encounter.

One thing we did for him, that he really appreciated, was to keep recharging his phone card, so he could call his wife and children whenever he had access to a phone. That made one less expense that they had to worry about.

Web cams, if you have a computer. It was a way for us to see each other with so many miles separating us. My husband often said, he missed my smile the most, and when we acquired and began using the web cams, his morale lifted quite a bit. (this one can be tricky as the internet cafés over seas often slow down when more than a couple of these are in use at once.)

Print off address labels on the computer, including return address. We did some for other family members as well, mostly for the two grandmothers. Once we had an address label made, we stored it on "desktop" so we only had to double click and print.

I sent phone cards once they hooked up with a satellite phone that would let them use them.

Always number the letters and packages so your soldier knows if he/she is missing one. Write your soldier everyday. It doesn't matter if it is a long or short letter, note, card, or just a newspaper clipping, they live for the mail from you.

We always kept his phone card charged with minutes, we get our phone cards at Sam's Club, make sure you have a copy of the card both sides, that way you can call the number and check his minutes usage, and put more minutes on with your credit card, and you have his number just in case he loses it. He will never not have enough minutes to call home!

Try to get your loved one to take and use a video recorder, tape recorder, journal, cameras to document their experience.

Keep in mind the time difference – Iraq is 9 hours ahead of us (CST) – they will call in the middle of the night. That was hard to get used to and startled me at first. Calls lasted about 15 minutes and sometimes got cut off or weren't good connections. There's a delay between you talking and them hearing it and sometimes a beep warns that the phone call is going to end soon. I hated the beeps, the calls are never long enough.

Keep a list next to the phone, so you don't forget what you want to ask them or tell them.

Send a tape recorder with your loved one, and have one at home.

Ask your soldier, if at all possible, to e-mail you an "I am Safe" note as often as possible. Although, the soldiers are busy, an e-mail like this can decrease the number of sleepless hours for a parent, and it doesn't take much time.

Get online – email and the internet are your friends. Stay off chat rooms.

Buy a digital camera/ web cam. Even if it's not the best quality, he'll still be able to see you and the kids when he's gone.

Using a calling card on a cell phone IS NOT FREE!! You not only use your calling card minutes but you are charged the overseas charges on the cell phone.

Invest in a cell phone and 'ear bud' hands free device, if you haven't already. Make sure your soldier knows your cell phone #...and keep the phone with you at all times. If your soldier can't reach you at your home #, your soldier will KNOW you can be reached on your cell phone. It becomes your morale life line. The 'ear bud' is a life saver when you are in noisy areas that your cell ring is hard to hear. After I missed a call at an outdoor company picnic, I never travel without my 'ear bud' in place!

Make notes of important things you want to share or ask your soldier. Keep this by the house phone...or on a small sticky note attached to your cell phone (I place mine inside my leather clip case). When your soldier calls...and your mind goes blank...you'll have your notes to help you!

Security Considerations – “Loose Lips Sink Ships”

One of the biggest challenges you will face is to walk the fine line between what is okay to share in the way of information and what will potentially jeopardize your Soldier and the unit. When in doubt, always err on the side of keeping information to yourself.

NEVER put future troop movement information, your soldier's name and unit, or other sensitive information on internet chat rooms. Assume that Bad Guys regularly monitor those sites, and may very well be one of your chat buddies that will try to gain your confidence.

Be very careful about information you give out over the phone, emails, internet, or to other people. Keep safety and security as your top priority.

Gossip and rumors spread quickly. Don't believe everything until the unit puts it out. Don't ever repeat what you hear about other people. You might not have meant anything by it but it could come back to haunt you.

Loose lips sink ships – always be security conscious. Don't trust those innocent sounding people online.

Bottom line, with information available almost instantly from your Soldier and the media, it puts more responsibility on you to help maintain security than in any previous war. The internet is a very valuable resource for you if used properly, it is a very dangerous thing for our Soldiers if family members pass on information that should not be repeated across this world wide communications tool. If in doubt, keep it to yourself. If your Soldier talks about a future movement, do NOT repeat it until after the movement has been completed.

And on another security note, from the mother of a Soldier whose wife left Fort Hood and her apartment for an extended stay at home, and had her apartment burglarized: What I am trying to say is - please tell everyone, single or not, if they are being deployed or the wife ends up doing what my daughter did, put all valuables in storage or a safe place with someone they know. I had heard that there were several break-ins with Military service people that had been deployed. So you might mention this. I am sure had my daughter known at the time she came for the Christmas visit that she was not going to return to Killeen until March or April she would have put this stuff in storage, because she already has a storage there. It makes sense. These thieves are smart enough to know how easy it would be to break into some of these deployed soldiers place since they know they will be gone.

Taking Care of Yourself, Dealing with Stress

Always remember – No news is good news, bad news travels fast.....

Friends are not always understanding. "A Year isn't that long" until you are not able to talk to your soldier. Get involved with the USO and such things if you are far away from base to feel like you are a part of a military community. After all you are dating a soldier!

Try to find times to meet other military significant others. As for girlfriends, it's extremely important to find someone who understands and that you can talk about issues with. Other military girlfriends are great. Many wives don't understand the issues that girlfriends may face.

Parents - Call the wife/husband at least once a day or once a week to find out how they are doing. Be a support person for them and let them know you love them and how special they are. Thank them for being who they are and you appreciate them for being there for your love ones. If possible and you are near by, give the husband/wife a night off and let them spend it doing what they want to do, because they are under a lot of stress and taking over all of the responsibilities. Have the children over for the weekend.

If you're a worrier, ask spouse not to share too scary of details all of the time. It's usually not helpful to know exactly how many times they've dodged a bullet or been in a dangerous situation.

Stay busy with your own growth and development (whether that is school, exercise, or just eating out) while your spouse is away. Stay positive. Don't watch news all day. Establish a comfortable routine. Have lunch with friends/support group weekly and call someone every day or so – doesn't have to be same person. Ask friends in group for help and offer to help in return. Call to go to movies with friends.

As a parent, don't be upset if your child writes more to their spouse or girlfriend (boyfriend). Be willing to help with child care etc. but if you feel like you are in the way...then back off. They will let you know when they need your help. Keep a positive attitude especially when dealing with young children. If they know you are worried, then it will upset them even more.

I also suggest, if you have the time, get involved with one of the online groups that support the troops. My husband's company was lucky enough to have an entire site and huge group of ladies supporting them throughout the deployment. They sent them package after package and it was extremely appreciated by all the soldiers. They helped us out tremendously and we can never thank them enough. (A word of caution, only deal with online support groups that are controlled and monitored by someone responsible that keeps it safe and positive).

Find someone who's "been there"....or who is going through the same thing. I look forward to helping a parent whose son or daughter goes to replace my son! Support on the home front is so important.

Buy a hard copy journal or if you prefer use your computer to create a journal. Start with the feelings you had when you heard your husband, wife, son or daughter was being deployed. Record your thoughts, feelings, and experiences throughout the many "highs and lows" you will have during this deployment. Plus writing is a great way to reduce the many stressors that occur when your loved one is deployed.

Pray like you've never prayed before!!!! Hope beyond all hope for a mid-tour two week R&R. I think it saved my life. At least so far!!!!

Stay involved in your church, community, kids' schools – but keep in mind you may also need to slow down some because your soldier isn't there to help (but then again, we all know that a lot of times when they are here, they're still not available so this may not be a problem after all!)

It's not fair and it's not fun. But who said everything in life is fair or fun? It is okay to go have a pity party, just don't become a resident there.

The thing that helped me most here at home (and I had a VERY difficult time) was organizing a fund raising project to send packages to our local troops from their hometown. It was so rewarding to completely throw myself into something that would benefit our boys and in some small way bring them some happiness and show them all the support from home. It's also very helpful to find other moms who also have sons over there. No one understands like another mom! I also saw a counselor for awhile, which helped tremendously. I've been on anti depressants and anti anxiety meds also, but you definitely need a support system—MOMS!

EXERCISE!

Start up a "Support Our Troops" group in your town. One of the best things for me was to be doing something worthwhile with other mothers in my area. We supported not only the soldiers by mailing gift boxes, remembering birthdays, etc... we also supported one another, and continued to keep our area aware...remember the media is so lax...it helps to remind others that our soldiers are not all home and need our thoughts and prayers.

STAY BUSY. Get involved. Join the Enlisted Spouses' Club, the Officer's Wives Club, Spouses' of Deployed Soldiers...and get involved with activities. These groups have fun activities, do fundraising for scholarships, Fisher House, Families in Crises, Red Cross, and other local worthy groups.

MEET People...by attending groups (FRGs, Clubs, Groups) you have the opportunity to vent, share experiences, laugh, and cry...

GET OUT...don't stay cooped up at home. Feeling that you need to deprive yourself because your soldier is living a Spartan life is not necessary! Schedule a night out once a week to go to dinner with other spouses...go to a movie...even if you have to go by yourself.

Try (it's hard) not to worry and think the worst all the time. Remember our military is the best!

Count your blessings as far as the technology we have available to even have any contact with them. WWII vets think we have it good compared to what little contact they had with their families.

You will cry, anyplace, anytime....songs and national anthem and seeing anything military or patriotic really starts it. You will feel a whole new sense of pride and patriotism. Holidays and birthdays, anniversaries might be tougher, do something special for them and yourself.

Take really good care of yourself/your health. This is a lot of stress to carry around. Get help if you need it!

I called my mother in law a couple of times a week, and we forged a friendship based on our common concern for my husband. We also had a ladies only night monthly within the troop, to give us all a chance to blow off some steam, have fun with other adults, and just make friends. Personally, I also had some close girlfriends with small children and we did a sleepover weekly to support each other, and have a little downtime. Babysitting partners (even one good friend can help) are free and give you a little time away – all these things helped us relieve stress.

While my husband has been away there were a great amount of lessons learned.

The biggest lessons start the first week that they have left. Do not sit around feeling sorry for yourself. Surround yourself with family and friends and don't feel bad about going out and having fun! Trust me, your spouse does not want you sit home and cry over them the whole time that they are gone. Be strong when you are able to talk, but let them know that you miss them and it is hard without them, but you will be okay until they return. That will let them be able to focus on the mission at hand. If you do not have any kids, the best thing you can do for yourself is go and get a part time or full time job, but you need to get out and not worry for a few hours each day. Don't get mad at people who do not understand. They try but nobody other than military spouses will understand. So stay in touch with those who you can talk to and are going through the same experience. Please do yourself and your spouse a favor and put as much money away as possible. You will want it for when they get home. And always remember it is always okay to cry.

Keep the big picture in mind and do not get caught up in the little petty crap.

Be patient.

Ask for help when you need it. I am a new wife and found that the veteran wives are the BEST, they know what the deal is and are more than willing to help, offer an ear or point you in the right direction.

Don't keep stuff bottled up. Talk to your friends and other wives.

Keep your sense of humor.

Waterproof mascara.

Be strong, not only for your soldier, but yourself.

The one thing I learned from this experience it to let go and let God. I placed him in God's hands. It was the hardest thing I have gone through and will be the hardest thing I will go through again next month.

Be sure to make friends with others that have loved ones being deployed, these friendships will last a life time even if you never see the person.

Write down all the little things you now do not realize is so important to your soldier, do not expect to remember everything (go buy a journal or cheap notebook). Amazing how you get relief writing your feelings down.

Have faith, write letters of encouragement, emphasizing that their work is THE most important duty in America.

Pray.

I believe the most important lesson I learned is to get a support network around you. My son left last February, and I was not prepared to feel so alone. Initially family, friends and co-workers would ask about my son daily and show tremendous support. But by April or so, people began to stop asking about him and I felt very isolated because this was the only topic I was interested in. Their lives go on and you are stuck with the fear and frustration everyday. I don't blame them, I would have gone on too, if I were them. I sought out information on the computer constantly and stumbled upon embedded reporter websites and bulletin boards where wives, parents and loved ones would ask the reporters questions or ask them to pass on messages to their soldier. By mere accident I saw a post about the 4th ID Association website and I found my support. No matter if you're seeking information, passing on news, or just needing a laugh...for the majority of

us, we knew why we were there. We needed each other. No explanations were necessary on what was really on our minds. It has been nice to know that this group of strangers came together and became what we all needed. (Be careful with what you pass along on bulletin boards and chat rooms – always remember, "Loose Lips Sink Ships").

My advice to any family member with a soldier deploying is get the support. Don't be shy. Keeping our mental health in all this is of the utmost importance.

Take the opportunity to 'spring' clean your house one room at a time! Toss things that have piled up...it will keep your mind occupied and reward you with more organization and less 'stuff' for the next PCS move!

DON'T watch the news constantly. You will stress yourself out.

Don't believe rumors.

Wear your unit insignia – you never know when someone will recognize it and you'll make a new friend and extend your support group.

This has been my first deployment as the spouse of a soldier. We have only been married three years this May and when he left last March, our children were one year and three months old. I think what I have learned from this is that the more you do, the less it hurts. I spent this deployment not only taking care of the regular day to day stuff, but also doing single soldier packages, remodeling our house, and taking care of the wives in our FRG. I have found that the more things I get involved in, the faster the time goes and it makes it easier.

Be in contact with other military girlfriends. If possible and you are accepted, be in contact with military spouses also. Often times, friends don't understand but being a part of a military community allows one to feel close to their military person. Contact a USO if you have one near you, and volunteer.

Try not to cry on the phone when they call...Tell them you love them **every time** they call and in every letter and package...Be strong for them. They are scared and nervous too....Never give up, support, support, SUPPORT them...

Tell close friends your daily problems - try not to burden your spouse with small details they cannot control. If you know your spouse will worry excessively, try to tell spouse after you've fixed the problem, if at all possible. Depending on your situation, you may want to discuss potential huge expenditures with your spouse prior to making non-urgent purchases.

Rumor control - support group can help in verifying/denying rumors. Fellowship after church with fellow spouses and families included family lunch at the PX food court.

Some of the other things that helped me out were:

- give your spouse tons of love and support
- find a Bob Babcock

I hate to admit it, but I had mentally planned a funeral and felt so very guilty and didn't understand why I kept thinking about it. I asked a friend whose son had already returned from Iraq. She said it was very "normal" and lots of people do it.

Mistakes to avoid: Including stress of any kind in your letters, phone calls or emails. We all face stress - very high stress. There's no way to avoid it. Personally I often felt like I was having a nervous breakdown. But the one thing my husband told me after he'd been back a few months was that stress was the worst thing to hear. One of our wives would rant to her husband every

time he called, and even threatened divorce several times. Obviously, this is not helpful at all. Find another outlet for your stress.

But please don't pass it on to your soldiers. As unfair as it is to bear the burden of life's everyday stresses alone, no one wants their soldier to be thinking about bills not getting paid, health problems with wife or kids, domestic problems, etc. when they're taking fire and need to stay completely alert. Even more damaging is the way those stresses eat away at them during the down time, especially when they know there's nothing they can do about it. **Obviously, there are emergency exceptions, but try to remember the big picture.**

And don't forget to send lots of Imodium and Tums - there are lots of parasites and bacteria around that will invade their bodies no matter how careful they are, particularly in the Tigris River.

Share how you really feel. Even if it's bad, he'd rather know that than wonder what's going on.

Deal with things as they come up. We found out the hard way. We had one situation that was bad enough, then I had to tell him about another related one and we ended up trying to solve two very serious problems over messenger.

My husband and I have spent a total of 4 and a half months together in since November of 2001 and one of the things that has helped us to get through the separation is open communication. He missed our son's birth in 2002 and our daughter's birth in 2003 so keeping involved helps a lot. From asking doctors to make an extra sonogram to send to your husband, to what you want to get for your house and how the kids are doing, keep him involved. Just because they are away and have a lot of other things on their minds doesn't mean they don't want to feel like you are trying to baby them so that they don't have anything to worry about. They still want to be part of what's going on back home. Same thing for when they get home, it might take time to get back into the swing of things when they get back but at least they know what they are coming home to. In the long run, it helps both of you out cause at least you know he knows what's going on and he can offer his opinion or even give you advise on what to do about the situation. (Editor's Note: It's a fine line to walk about telling your soldier too many of the day to day problems that he can't do anything about and not telling him enough about major challenges you are dealing with).

The worry, the anxiety, the fear, the missing them - there was a long time where I was letting all of that eat at me. I did not go out with my friends or really do anything special. I didn't want to. How could I live when my brother is in harm's way and risking his life for others. My husband and friends would try to get me out, but I had isolated myself. I actually found that I was kind of angry at them for trying to drag me out of my safe place (locked inside myself). I thought I had to be strong for everyone, and I could not show weakness. In my mind, if I came out of isolation than they would all see my weakness and my pain and I didn't want that. I needed to be a rock for my parents and brother. Especially since I did not want my brother to worry about us and lose focus because of worry. (That is the way he is, it is a vicious cycle - we worry about him, he worries about us worrying about him, visa versa and back and forward). Guess what - my close friends and husband saw right through me anyway. Even though no one else did those close to me read it like a neon sign.

In the beginning I was good about asking for help - just someone to talk to. I talked to our FRG about concerns and fears, and a couple times to rear detachment with technical questions. Eventually I stopped calling when I needed someone to talk to. That was the biggest mistake I made - I just kept shoving everything to the pit of my stomach, until I broke and had made myself physically ill from the stress and worry and outright panic every time I saw something horrible happen in the vicinity of where my brother's unit was located. I knew that I had to somehow control the flood of emotions when months in to his deployment I was still waking up sick every day, and now, I was having horrible nightmares at night. These nightmares were all too vivid and left me increasingly more distraught. I was ok at work, but outside of work I was not functioning

and became more lethargic and sad. I had heard that it got worse before it gets better, but I had no clue until this time.

I can't pin down the exact turning point for me. I believe that it was a long and slow process of learning from each new experience and anxiety attack. I was always raised to put my faith in God and he will take care of everything. I always thought my faith was stronger. I take that back - my faith is strong, but I wasn't sure if God's will was something I might want to face. Again it goes back to the fear of the unknown. I believe that causes more emotions than imaginable and then the wide range of emotions created stuff I never experienced. Through a lot of prayer, talking about my feelings again, and releasing myself from my own isolation, I started dealing with the situation at hand better. Don't get me wrong - the worry, anxiety and missing your loved one does not go away. It is still there and sometimes it rears itself and it hurts. But, the bad days are not the norm any more. I know there are still days where I go home from work and cry, whether it is from fear, sadness because we have lost another precious, and selfless soldier, or because I just plain miss my kid brother. To be frank, I have not gotten a full night's sleep, or taken a full and deep breath since Jason was deployed - but I accept this is normal and I am not fighting it but using it as a learning experience. Even though some days I swear someone has taken the oxygen from this world. Strange as it sounds - it has been like a constant state of holding my breath (or being under water), but I have learned to take baby breaths to stay strong. Just accept what you are feeling and know that it is okay. We all deal in different ways and it is never easy to find comfort and peace while the one you love is in harms way. You know how it is, you have the exuberant feeling of being so full of pride and love, and the rock bottom feeling of fear, sadness, and anxiety all at the same time. (Up, down, up, down, etc.).

Ideas for Children

Deployment preparations and preparing children - i.e. making a video tape of deploying soldier, reading a bedtime story, taking pictures of the deploying soldier for the children to look at during the deployment, cassette tapes, special toy Daddy gives, necklace, etc.

Have fun with your family! Keep a schedule – especially important with children. Observe holidays and traditions if possible. Go to church – eat out with families in group after church. Ask family friends/relatives to provide a positive male influence or get kids involved in Christian youth group.

Since our children are 18, 16, 11 and 8 yrs old, and fully capable of understanding the circumstances in Iraq, I decided to maintain a positive attitude over the whole situation. We do watch the news together. I have to admit we watch FOX News and avoid negative reporting.

Keeping a positive attitude and reassuring them of their father's abilities and that God will protect him has helped my children (and me) sleep soundly at night. Our environment here at home has been generally upbeat and lively. We miss their father and recognize his absence but it isn't something we dwell on or worry over, either. He'll be home when he is finished, something we are starting to get excited about.

I've seen the flip side, sad, crying, depressing homes. Their families haven't adjusted as well. I know I made the right decision, my children sleeping soundly at night is proof positive.

Celebrate everything for your soldier and your kids – whether it is ANY holiday, birthday, anniversary, a week without a note from the teacher....(it doesn't have to be a big party, but take the time to celebrate).

Get audio/video tapes of your soldier reading a few of your child's books, and sometime during the deployment have him do a couple of new ones.

I'm not sure what category this suggestion might fall under but I thought I should contribute. I myself am a future spouse of a Soldier, a daughter, sister, and niece to three other family members in Iraq as well. On top of that I teach first grade at a local elementary school here at Ft Lewis and have 14 of my 22 students with at least one parent deployed right now. I have gone through this once before as a young teen during Desert Storm so I have had the opportunity to experience both the adult and child version of deployment.

My suggestion (coming both from experience and what I see as a teacher) is to talk to your children. They hear things from television and on the radio and more often than not it is negative news. The kids worry that it might be "their Dad" that is hurt. By being open with your child it gives them the chance to ask questions, get answers, and get their feelings out. I remember my mom stressed out and losing it for no reason, not understanding the stress she was put under. As an adult I feel the stress and see the fear in my students when we hear that someone from our base has been hurt. Just simply talking with your child and filling them in with good news of what their parent may be doing can give them a sense of relief. I know that this may seem as a simple task but it truly does mean a lot to them. If this helps just one person I have done my job.

Do not tell young children that their parent is going off to fight bad guys. Instead tell them that their parent is going to **help** the people in Iraq (or wherever they are going.) Children do not need to know or hear about the dangers and definitely do not need the stress of thinking what a "bad guy" could do to their parent. As adults, we can handle it, but it is too much for children.

Buy a cheap plastic clock. On the top of it in black marker write, "Daddy's/Mommy's Time" and set the clock to the hour that it is wherever the deployed parent is. My children love to take the clock down and ask what time it is and what Daddy might be doing now.

Make paper chains (red, white, and blue) by adding one chain for each day the parent is away. You'll have a completely decorated house by the time he/she returns!

Have a world map. Mark the spots of where you live and where Mommy/Daddy is deployed. This is a great year for a geography lesson.

Plan a monthly night out at a restaurant with other "single" spouses. Everyone finds babysitters, and you enjoy a meal of adult conversation and eating your own food!

Take your friends and families up on their offers of help. If they ask what they can do, say, "Cook a meal. Take the kids for a couple hours." Etc. At the beginning, you may not feel like that is necessary, but by the midway point, you will be so ready for real cooked food and possibly not have the desire or energy to make it!

If you are feeling down, invite someone over for dinner. It will force you to be active by cleaning your house and cooking a meal. A good way to lift yourself up is by lifting another person up!

Get involved in your FRG. If you don't have one, talk to the commander, attend the FRG training classes on post, and start one! Do things as an FRG that will make life better for your soldier. Of course, you can package up care items. Another good idea is to make pillow cases for all the deployed parents. You can iron on pictures of yourself/your kids and write messages with fabric paint.

Instead of telling young children about the number of months in which Daddy/Mommy will be gone/back, tell them about the holidays that will have to pass before Daddy/Mommy returns. For example: "First we will have Valentine's Day, then St. Patrick's Day, then Easter, then Daddy will be home." Although they don't have much concept of months, weeks, etc, they do understand a little more about holidays.

Purchase the books [My Daddy Is a Soldier](#) by Kirk & Sharron Hilbrecht and [Daddy/Mommy, You're My Hero!](#) By Michelle Ferguson-Cohen and read them often.

Redeployment Tips

From the January 12, 2004 update: Over the next few weeks, I want to start a column on **"Redeployment Tips"**. For those of you who have been through long deployments before and have some helpful hints that our first timers could learn from, please send them my way. I'm also going to get some of the official redeployment instructions and advice from our TF Ironhorse leadership and chaplains to pass along over the next few weeks. I hope to have our first **"Redeployment Tips"** in an update later this week or next week. (Following have appeared in 4ID Updates from Iraq between January 13, 2004 and February 15, 2004).

Like everything I include in these updates, the information that will be included in this section is what makes sense to me to report. If I agree with something you send, I'll try to include it here. If you send something I don't agree with, I'll not report it. And just because I don't use your input doesn't mean I disagree with it, maybe I just don't have the space to include it or choose not to address the topic you bring up.

There is nothing official or scientific or guaranteed about any of these tips that will be carried over the next few weeks as we come to the end of our deployment. If it helps in some way, that is great. If you disagree with what is here, that's okay, too - I'm not going to use this as a forum for debates. **If you have experience with long deployments and the readjustment period that comes at the end of the deployment, I would like to hear your ideas and tips that others could benefit from.** I'll also include some tips that come in from official sources and pass on schedules of redeployment meetings at the various locations where our families are located.

Here are our first tips - from wives who have been through deployment of their soldiers before:

1) I have been through numerous redeployments with my husband from the **401st MP Company**. My best advice is to "let go and have fun". Yes! they've been gone a long time. Yes, you've been in control a long time. Yes, it's been a long time. But, let go of what you think things should be like, what you think he should be doing, and what you think will happen and just have fun getting to know him again. Go on lots of dates and let the past stay in the past. Whatever happened before he left happened and you can't change it. So let it go and start over. Act like honeymooners again!

2) Before my husband came home from Desert Storm the one thing I remember a Vietnam vet's wife telling me was let my husband take the lead in what or even if he wants to talk about things he did, things he saw, etc. Don't push it. Let him make the decision on this and don't be hurt if he chooses to talk to someone else who may understand better than I ever could what he went through. This is what I plan on doing this time as well. He knows he can talk to me but he also knows that I understand if he doesn't want to. (Great advice - and veterans many times will talk to other veterans before they'll talk to family members about bad experiences).

3) I think most and foremost if everyone remembers to take it slow and keep the lines of communication open. Both the soldier and the spouse has to be willing to accept the fact that we will all have changed and grown in some way or another over the deployment year.

In my research for redeployment advice, I remember one thing I read that cautioned against getting into a pissing contest with your soldier as to who suffered most during the deployment. WE ALL SUFFERED thru this in different ways but it will be in the past so don't dwell on it, it won't matter anymore, move forward, count your blessings and be thankful your soldier is home safe. Just like having a baby... once you lay eyes on that sweet face all the pain of labor is erased from you mind.

4) From a Vietnam vet: After my last year long deployment I had to realize when I got home that my wife had been the one taking care of everything while I was gone. She had to make all the decisions, be Mom and Dad, bill payer, handyman, and all the little things you just take for granted when you are home. You can't come back after being gone for a year or longer and expect to step back into the same role you were doing before you left. Take things slow and gradually work back into doing the things you were before. The biggest burden on my wife was the bill paying, so I took that over. Making decisions about how to handle things is something else you have to work back into doing. Make joint decisions - discuss the matter then you both decide. Keep open communications - that is the strongest piece of advice someone you can give to someone coming home. Relax and discuss things openly. There will be things you won't want to talk about, and you need to let them know. Just keep an open mind and communicate with each other.

5) From experience of redeployment I think that spouses should be aware that they need to start putting money aside because they will not have that extra income that they are used to having. I would hope that with this deployment finance will stop the extra money without any interruption in our spouses pay, but when my husband returned from Bosnia the extra money didn't stop for a few months and the Army took it back all at once, leaving us with no pay due for a few months. Thank God I was smart enough to realize that we should not have had that money and put it aside for a rainy day.

6) I check out a couple other military websites (of deployed units - my son's friends) and one site notes that when you come back and want to get your vehicle out of Army storage you need proof of insurance. I wonder if anyone knows the details, as I am sure some car registrations have expired too, and knowing the Army (I was a tanker's wife), the paperwork will have to be in order to pick up a vehicle. (Editor's Note: It's not too soon to start thinking about renewing vehicle registration and insuring you have the required insurance. Better to get the details now than to scramble when your soldier gets home).

7) From a wife who has been through three long deployments: My advice when the soldiers come home and you reunite is to not have a lot of things planned. Go slow. It is a time of readjustment. It's important to not have any unreal expectations. Do the simple things you used to enjoy doing together like sitting on the porch talking, taking the kids to the park, watching a favorite movie on TV, go out to eat or for an ice cream, go to the movies, or take a walk together hand in hand. Keep communications open. Understand that your soldier may be tired when he/she gets back. Be proud of each other and all that you both have accomplished during the deployment. The soldier should compliment his spouse on how well he/she did while he/she was deployed. Be proud that your spouse may have become more independent and be proud that your spouse has handled things well while you were deployed. If you have children, give them time to also adjust and expect them to test you. The soldier should try to spend alone time with each child when he/she can. Try to keep your routine with the children's activities and school. Be sure to stick to your budget, and not go on big shopping sprees.

8) My reunion tip: Resist the urge to use "fix-it" phrases like "it's ok, you're home now" or "you don't have to think about any more, you're home." (I'm a readjustment counselor of vets from the last three wars).

9) As a preteen my dad deployed during Desert Storm. He took a month of leave when he came home and was around all the time. After 7 months of "freedom" while he was gone, it was hard to adjust to his stricter rules when he came back. Now, as a soldier looking forward to going home, I can understand the desire to be home a lot and recreate a niche for myself. But, it is very important for soldiers to understand that families are not used to them being there and have had a year to create a new routine. Much like leaders arriving at new units, service members should spend some time observing the new family routines before trying to change

things. And family members should remember that they aren't the only ones making adjustments.

10) From a reader: My mother-in-law wanted me to send along this tip. If you are extended family - parents, siblings, grandparents - please understand that your son/daughter needs to spend some time alone with his or her spouse and kids. It isn't that they don't want to see you but they need that adjustment time first before the big family reunion. (Editor's Note: Or, if you go to the arrival homecoming, don't stay too long or maybe volunteer to watch the kids for a few days while the couple gets away. Key is, ask the couple what their preference is. I met my wife for a week in Kansas City before we headed to Oklahoma to see family after my return from Vietnam).

11) I was reading today's tips, and I REALLY hope we see more from the Vietnam vets. (Editor's Note: Lots of my Vietnam vet buddies are reading this - let's hear your words of experience. Interestingly, fewer of us Vietnam vets were married during deployment than is the case now, but we still have words of wisdom).

Anyway, this is my husband's third deployment longer than six months. After each one we have had our share of issues. We always come up with a problem/ issue that we haven't met before. Never fails. We learned how to talk to each other after the first one (after about 4 months of communication classes recommended to us by our pastor)...definitely worth every minute of effort involved. After the second one we decided to figure out exactly where his place was in the family - I had a heck of a time reintegrating him into MY routines. He would give up, go sit down and watch TV with a "Fine, do it your way." which would piss me off even more. Used some of those invaluable lessons from above and worked that one out (but it also took time and patience). We also had disagreements about the children after that one. I had just spent a year being consistent keeping them from becoming monsters...he came home, wanted to spoil them absolutely rotten and let them do pretty much anything they wanted. **Don't fight in front of the children!!!!** They will divide and conquer to get their way if you let them. This one was also resolved - we are now a united front. Even now, my six year old will ask Dad for something over email, and the first thing from my husband is, "What did your mom say?" Good man.

12) From Linda Odierno, wife of MG Ray Odierno, Commanding General of 4ID and Task Force Ironhorse: There are a lot of great resources on Ft. Hood and Ft. Carson. Reunion can be wonderful and special, but it can also be a little stressful. My experience having been through three major deployments is the importance of going through the Army's Re-deployment briefings. The briefings provide information and techniques which will ease the stress of the homecoming and are designed to help guard against any problems. All the soldiers will receive reunion briefings before they leave Iraq and there will be an extensive program when they return to the States. There are briefings/classes available for you through your Family Readiness Group, Rear Detachment Commander, and Unit Chaplain. You may find out the dates at your Unit Family Readiness Group Meeting or you may contact them to find out when the re-deployment brief will be given. You will be glad you attended. The briefings inform you on what to expect when your soldier returns. No matter how long you have been married, you will find the briefings very helpful. Enjoy being together again.

13) After this being our fifth major deployment in 12 years, we have learned a few things in the past. It's a remarriage of sorts every time. You have the honeymoon phase where you are so glad to see each other and you go nowhere without the other. Then you slowly move into the every day life stage where the bills and the kids catch back up to you. You have to learn to live and enjoy every day, every minute, and remember to readjust to giving each other that "living room" around each other. Each one of you had your own schedule to keep and did not answer to the other. Where you were going you just went, now you have to make decisions together again as one person. Your children need to see that unity or they will divide and conquer and that makes readjustment harder, especially for them. The main thing is you have to talk about

the household issues. You can't pretend or assume that the other is taking care of them. Wives, please don't get the attitude that he has been gone and you have carried this burden long enough and now it is his turn to carry the kids and the bills. Trust me, he carried his own weight of worry for you and the kids, plus his job. You have to work together as a team. Husbands, please don't come and sit down and just do nothing at home and expect her to wait on you. We know you had a rough time, but so did your wife and children. This was a hard time for everybody, reunion is not a time to get selfish and say now is the time I get mine. Reunion is a time to come together and to bind together and work as one, to be whole again. Honor one another, love one another.

14) From a single soldier, veteran of six deployments: For many of our single soldiers (including officers) this is their first deployment. All of our soldiers who live in the barracks put their belongings in storage and those of us renting turned in our house and put our belongings in storage as well. Vehicles have been sitting in storage for over a year and it is very likely we will be facing lots of dead batteries and flat tires. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask the family members to remember those soldiers who will be returning to no hugs and kisses of loved ones at the gym and an empty room and fridge, and offer some suggestions on how to give them a heroes welcome as well. Talk to your soldier. See if they can give you one or two names of single soldiers in the unit you can "adopt" for a few days after deployment. Make a welcome home sign with their name on it to wave at the gym, (even though they know they don't have family in the stands, they will still be eagerly scanning the bleachers for a familiar face). One of the hardest moments of redeploying is watching families reunite while you're standing by yourself waiting for the call to load the bus. Make a little goodie bag to give to single soldiers (along with a hug or two) before they get on the bus to go to their barracks/hotel room with some fruit, chips, a sandwich or two, a drink, and a phone card so they'll have something to snack on when they get to their rooms and be able to call their family to let them know they are home. (all of our phones were turned off before we left). They will not have a car for a few days to run to the shoppette and for those arriving after hours, it could be a long wait between meals before the dining facility opens.

Volunteer your precious time. Soldiers will not want to intrude on your family's time. Offer to drive some single soldiers to the Commissary or auto shop, Wal-mart, laundry or some of the hundred other errands they will have to do. Offer to help get their car in working condition, or take them to get it registered. Invite them to go out for pizza or a movie and share your family, pets and your children's laughter. Let them borrow some old towels and sheets to use until their HHGs get out of storage. Offer to drive them to the airport if they are leaving to go see their families. Check in on them every few days to see how they are doing and let them know you're thinking of them. If you have an extra room, offer to let someone stay at your house while their looking for a new apartment. Small acts of kindness on your part will last a lifetime in the hearts and memories of those you help. (Editor's Note: Wow - obviously spoken from the heart of a soldier who knows the ropes, thanks a million for sending this).

15) From experience of redeployment I think that spouses should be aware that they need to start putting money aside because they will not have that extra income that they are used to having. I would hope that with this deployment, finance will stop the extra money without any interruption in our spouses pay, but when my husband returned from Bosnia the extra money didn't stop for a few months and the Army took it back all at once, leaving us with no pay due for a few months. Thank God I was smart enough to realize that we should not have had that money and put it aside for a rainy day.

16) The following web pages were provided by the Extension Agent, Lane Volunteer Center, Mobilization and Deployment at Fort Hood with the following note: I've attached a document that is a listing of several websites dealing with reunion. The issues for both parents and children and advice and tips. Perhaps your audience will find it useful.

Operation READY Reunion

http://www.smdc.army.mil/FamilyPrograms/OpReady/pdf_ppt/reunion/reunion1.pdf

<http://www.apa.org/releases/homecoming.html>

Air force Crossroads website link

http://www.afcrossroads.com/famseparation/return_menu.cfm

Guard and Reserve Redeployment Plan

<http://www.defenselink.mil/ra/family/toolkit/pdf/A-1-3.pdf>

Guard and Reserve Reunion and Homecoming

<http://www.defenselink.mil/ra/family/toolkit/pdf/C-2-4.pdf>

Post deployment Homecoming and Reunion, ACS Link Operation READY (old version)

<http://trol.redstone.army.mil/acslink/opready/homecoming.pdf>

New Operation READY resource materials, includes reunion video and materials

http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_deployment/data/modules/pbm/rendered/operation_ready.asp

Reunion Handout

http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_deployment/user/res/res_user_process.asp?action=download_resource&ChannelID=146903&IgnoreTimeout=True&ObjectID=4124

Children's Reactions to the Soldiers Return

http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_deployment/user/res/res_user_process.asp?action=download_resource&ChannelID=146903&IgnoreTimeout=True&ObjectID=4123

Children's Reactions to the Soldiers Return, Handout # 2

http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_deployment/user/res/res_user_process.asp?action=download_resource&ChannelID=146903&IgnoreTimeout=True&ObjectID=4089

Reunion Stress, Handout # 3

http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_deployment/user/res/res_user_process.asp?action=download_resource&ChannelID=146903&IgnoreTimeout=True&ObjectID=4090

Stress Symptoms, Handout # 4

http://www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_deployment/user/res/res_user_process.asp?action=download_resource&ChannelID=146903&IgnoreTimeout=True&ObjectID=4092

(Editor's Note: I haven't had time to check all the sites to insure they are valid but the ones I have checked were all there so I assume they are all good addresses).

17) I'd like to thank the single soldier for offering some tips to help the single soldiers when they return. Our soldier is also single. We live several states away from Ft. Hood and aren't sure if we'll make it to greet him. We will appreciate it if anybody is there to help him out. Can anybody offer us any advice on what we can do from afar to make his homecoming easier, even if we aren't there in the gym? We've already done the things that were previously suggested - make sure his car registration is updated, and he has proof of insurance, etc. What about his immediate needs - a hotel reservation? But we don't know the exact day he will return..... (Editor's Note: there will be barracks available for single soldiers when they return).

18) From a soldier: After my last year long deployment I had to realize when I got home that my wife had been the one taking care of everything while I was gone. She had to make all the

decisions, be Mom and Dad, bill payer, handyman, and all the little things you just take for granted when you are home. You can't come back after being gone for a year or longer and expect to step back into the same role you were doing before you left. Take things slow and gradually work back into doing the things you were before. The biggest burden on my wife was the bill paying, so I took that over. Making decisions about how to handle things is something else you have to work back into doing. Make joint decisions - discuss the matter then you both decide. Keep open communications - that is the strongest piece of advice someone you can give to someone coming home. Relax and discuss things openly. There will be things you won't want to talk about, and you need to let them know. Just keep an open mind and communicate with each other.

19) From the wife of a soldier with three major deployments: Don't feel bad if you think you need help and need to talk to someone like your Unit Chaplain. They are helpful and compassionate and knowledgeable people.

(Editor's Note: How about you husbands with wives deployed - do you have any input to pass on for others to learn from? Also, let's hear more tips for single soldiers).

20) I've noticed in the updates that many family members of single soldiers are worried about their loved ones "immediate needs" after their return. I don't know specifics, but maybe this will be of some comfort to them. The command structure will not fail your sons or daughters. They will make sure that they have a place to stay - plenty of barracks are being cleaned up and repaired as we speak. They will have enough food, true it may not be home cooking, but it isn't food that has had to travel hundreds of miles before it was prepared either. Plus there are several fast food places on post and a bunch of restaurants that are only a taxi ride away. And when they get off the planes there will be a welcome home ceremony where everyone will make your soldier glad to be home and very appreciated. Our battalion's FRG (**1/66 AR BN, Semper in Hostes, Iron Knights!!!**) made goodie bags for our returning soldiers and passed them out to the single soldiers returning from Iraq for ETS and PCS prior to the stop loss and stop movement orders. I went to almost every flight that had our soldiers on it to pass out the bags and to thank them. We made signs and yelled like crazy at the ceremony - great fun even though it wasn't our (those that went to pass the bags out) husbands or relatives. I was very impressed by the amount of attention given to those flights/ceremonies, so I can imagine what will be done for welcoming home of an entire outfit. Many FRG's are running like mad to raise funds for these welcome home events, this will be in addition to what the Army, itself, provides. If your son (sorry gals, were a combat battalion) is in our battalion, 1/66 AR BN, we are going to have a goodie bag (that has some good old fashioned American munchies and personal hygiene items in them and a few extras we've been working on for months) in each room and we are working with the powers that be to see if they will let us go in and make the beds. We are also looking to coordinate transportation to take the soldiers to the PX, etc. for the first couple of days. Your sons have done so much for the world, there is no way we would let them down!!! Iron Knights!!!! A proud Army wife.

And from another Army wife on the same topic: As for the single soldiers returning home, please let your readers know that FRG groups are making plans that definitely include the single soldiers! We will make sure everyone is taken care of ! Ft. Hood is one BIG family!!

21) From the husband of a deployed soldier: This is my first deployment as a military husband. Luckily my wife and I have been able to keep the lines of communication open during the past year. I would like to share some thoughts and ideas that I have come upon with preparing for the redeployment. 1.) Make no firm plans. I know that it will take time for my wife to get her body adjusted to returning to a new time zone. She may want to sleep longer or stay up later but I am going to try and be flexible. 2.) A good gift for those wives (and maybe husbands) when they get home is a nice hot bath in a clean bathroom. I am going to make sure she can soak in the tub a few hours with some candles, music and big fluffy towels. I know it's been

showers and baby-wipe baths for the past year so a good hot tub soaking will feel good. In addition to the bath, I have found several good websites and books in the libraries on how to give backrubs. My wife has told me on several occasions how she needs a massage so bad cause her cot hurts her back. Since I can't really afford to send her to a professional I figure I could learn some tricks and surprise her. 3.) Be ready to listen. I know guys get hit with the notion of being bad listeners, and frankly most of us are, but this is going to be a time when your wife is going to need an ear. Also invest in tissues, lots of them, cause if anyone's wife is like mine she has a lot of crying pent up cause as she puts it "It doesn't do my soldiers any good to see me cry." 4.) Plan an escape. If you can't afford a real trip away or have to wait a while for block leave, lock the doors, find a sitter (or parents/in-laws), take the phones off the hook and just enjoy the time together.

22) An excellent tip from a wise woman: I really appreciate your 4ID updates. I am a 74 yr old Mother of a son in Iraq. I am also the wife of 52 years to a Vietnam and Korean veteran. Some of these redeployment tips are not only tips for redeployment, but are tips for everyday life if you expect to make marriage a lifetime commitment. For instance, one of the "tips" from your January 19 update that I have highlighted in bold below:

Take things slow and gradually work back into doing the things you were before. The biggest burden on my wife was the bill paying, so I took that over. **Making decisions about how to handle things is something else you have to work back into doing. Make joint decisions - discuss the matter then you both decide. Keep open communications - that is the strongest piece of advice** someone you can give to someone coming home. Relax and discuss things openly. There will be things you won't want to talk about, and you need to let them know. **Just keep an open mind and communicate with each other.** (Smart words - definitely worth repeating).

23) One of our FRG leaders sent me this great web page. It covers pre-deployment, deployment sustainment, and post-deployment. Lots of information in here for active army, reserves, national guard. I suggest you check it out and bookmark it for future use:
www.deploymentconnections.org

24) Editor's Note: There are a few points that I feel strongly about and want to make along the way. Having gone through the redeployment process after my year in Vietnam, there is nothing I've put in the updates the past couple of weeks that I don't agree with (if I don't agree with a suggestion, I just don't publish it). Now it's time for one of my strong recommendations.

I've often said, if I were President of the United States, I'd pass a law that didn't allow service members to make large dollar expenditures for the first 30 days after their return from a combat zone. Foolishly, I traded a perfectly good 1965 Mustang (with 35,000 miles on it and almost paid for) in the summer of 1967 for a fancy new Chevrolet Caprice that I couldn't afford. My sole reason for doing it was that the Mustang wasn't air conditioned and I didn't want to ride around in the summer in a car that wasn't air conditioned after spending a year in the heat of Vietnam. For the next several years, I struggled with car payments that I couldn't afford.

After a year of not focusing on finances, our soldiers (at least I was guilty of it) have lost perspective of the value of money to a certain extent. So - if you agree with me, you can save this recommendation and show it to your soldier when he/she wants to spend big money within the first month of arrival back home.

I highly recommend you give it at least 30 days to let reality settle back in, let the reality of the loss of special combat pay get back into the family budget, and save yourself many months of digging out of a financial bind that you could get yourself in to. Take it from a guy who carried the scars of a bad financial decision for several years as I went through my mid 20's.

25) From the mother of an **82nd Airborne Division** soldier: My advice to those parents of young soldiers who have to travel to come to Ft Hood or Ft Carson etc to greet their soldiers is to try and be patient and flexible. It is difficult to plan and make arrangements for the trip because of the nature of the flights. They give you a window but it may change and likely will. I am far more anxious now than I was when he left and I heard another mother in today's update say the same thing.

26) Get your house in order. My soldier told me none of those things mattered to him and not to kill myself cleaning and organizing before he got home...but guess what --THEY DID MATTER! Within seven days, the "honeymoon was over," and he began moving things around, sorting through what to keep or toss, and complaining about the clutter in the garage. I wanted to kick myself for believing he would just be happy to be home. Have a garage sale, solicit help from friends, or splurge on a cleaning service, but for goodness sake -- GET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER! :) The extra work or expense will be well worth it and save you many arguments in the long run.

27) Bob, I would like to address a problem that so far I have not seen in your redeployment updates. I keep reading about "Redeployment Day", BUT SORRY, it is not a day but a period of TIME. With so many troops coming home it will take several weeks to complete this mission. I would strongly recommend to the wives, mothers, and other family members waiting for their soldiers to come home to keep this in mind - "the first to leave is not always the first to come home." There are other factors that figure into the equation, such as the importance of their jobs or having a turtle (replacement) to train and take over their position. Do not get upset when you see a person that left after your Soldier come home weeks before yours. This is the Military. This is Life. Just stay strong and remember soon it will be your time to rejoice and welcome your soldier home. Been there done that.

28) I recently spoke with a friend of mine who is a Veteran of many "global hot spots", Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom and asked him if he had any advice to give about the redeployment. He told me (as we have heard many times) to not question the soldiers, but to let them come to you about what has gone on in their deployment. He said that when they do come to you listen with a big ear and a closed mouth, that they are not necessarily wanting you to comment. Also, the same story may be told 15 different times, but told with different emotions each time. Maybe one time pride, another sorrow or remorse, and this is what makes it not the same old story, but different because of the emotion behind it. He said not to say, "I have heard this 10 times already!", but rather keep listening. He also told me not to get too upset with my Soldier if he wants to go play golf with the guys that he just saw for the last year. I have not seen him in a year and may think to myself, "hey, you have been with them, not me! Why do you need to go off with them", but those guys understand in ways that I never will. No matter how understanding I may try to be, they will be able to help him more than I many times because they were there with him through it and saw it first hand. He said that war buddies have an understanding and that sometimes you just need to be with them and maybe talk about it and maybe not, but many times things will be better when your Soldier returns home from that game of golf. My Friend speaks from experience, so I will listen!!

29) One invaluable lesson I learned after our last long deployment was to take the time to enjoy him coming home. By the time he came back, we had family and friends lined up insisting we had to come see them all. Trying to be kind and trying to let him see EVERYONE, his family and I had a long schedule jam packed with visiting as soon as he got the okay to take leave. Not only did this exhaust all of us - but with all the traveling, it made a very hard readjustment to our own home schedule. Not only were the kids dealing with Daddy coming home but also being carted around to several different relatives in a very short amount of time. We had no down time. He didn't get to get used to his own bed or couch (or refrigerator - lol). Please, remember, your soldier AND your family need to be the priority - if extended family and friends have waited a

year, they can wait a couple more weeks (be sure and keep in touch with them on the phone though) so you can just enjoy a little down time with just your soldier and your immediate family.

60 Days to Go - things to consider in the home stretch...

30) Start an exercise and weight loss program. Get back into the same, or better, shape that you were in when your soldier left. Doing this with others rather than alone is typically a much more effective way to be successful.

31) Practice living on the reduced pay that will happen once family separation, hostile fire, and other special pay is no longer paid, and taxes kick back in again. Use the extra pay over the next two months to build a rainy day fund for the future rather than spending it now.

32) Get your house in order, both your physical quarters and any loose ends that have come up over the past year. The more you can clear up now, the less you will have to deal with when your soldier comes home. Don't procrastinate, get those nitty details you've been putting off handled now.

33) Tell your soldier those things you've been keeping from him/her. No soldier wants to come home, expecting a happy homecoming, and get slapped in the face with bad news that wasn't told to him/her before their return. If the dog died, there are major family problems with in-laws, or other bad news items, go ahead and let it be known now so that it will get behind you and the homecoming won't be clouded with bad news. (This is another voice of experience from Bob - I'll never forget the disappointment of spending the first few weeks after I got home dealing with a significant problem that would have been solved while I was still in Vietnam, had I heard about it. Remember, our soldiers are surrounded now by their best friends who will help them through bad news. You don't need to 'protect' them from news they should know about - my mother pulled that one on my wife who wanted to tell me about it earlier. Bad decision on my mother's part, and on my wife's part for listening to that bad advice...).

34) This is the second war I have had to deal with and the repeated stories are something I noticed that does occur. At first it was something that was not wanting to be mentioned. Now it's easier to talk about something that has happened more than one time. If they do talk to you about it, that is because of that feeling they have at that time. Some will never express themselves to you. Just be patient with them. Be loving and not pushy. I totally agree with listening. If you are a talker, you better learn how to just listen. They love you and miss you and what they need is your support and love even after they come home. So remember when you see them for the first time in a year, or "again".... they look at you to give them that understanding of patience. Let them plan at their own pace. That is something I have learned in all my years is to be that person that can be leaned on at all times and not to be the judge of their emotions and feelings. I cannot wait for all the men to return home. Remember.... let them plan their days. I'm sure you will be able to do all the things you plan after a while :) I'm proud to be a US ARMY Soldier's wife of 4ID in Fort Hood, Texas. God bless them all and bless you with patience.

35) I appreciate your tips on the 60 day mark and what to do to get ready..... I agree about telling them now about bad news. I IM'd you about 7 months ago when my uncle died very suddenly. I asked your advice on whether we should tell my brother then over the phone, or wait. You said tell him then. My dad does not have a computer so he doesn't get your updates unless I print and mail them to him. Well, I called him and told him all about you and this daily update. Unfortunately, he could not bring himself to tell my brother over the phone (it was dad's brother that died). But out of respect for my dad, I did not tell our soldier. He came home at Thanksgiving for his 2 week mid tour leave. We told him as soon as he got in the car at the airport. It was so much harder for our dad than my brother. Our uncle died last June and we waited till November - five months of keeping it from him because Dad did not want to worry about him having this death on his mind while in Iraq. Well, you were right. He was so sad the

first couple of days. My advice, if there's a death in the family, tell them ASAP. It puts more pressure on us than we ever thought and we could not have closure to his death until we told our soldier. He asked us to never withhold info like that again, and now we know.

36) I have been reading the Redeployment Tips daily -- Great Stuff! Just read the ones from today's update (Jan 30th) and it made me think about my uncle. He fought in World War II and never discussed one detail of the action he saw with anyone until the late 1980's. What patience my aunt must have had to not push him for details!! However, after I joined the Army he began asking me questions about what types of equipment, units, etc. were in the Army's "inventory." About one year after he began asking me questions he located some of the guys that were in his unit -- way back then -- and not only did he start talking about his experiences during the war, but started attending the annual reunion with his "buddies." It not only had a tremendous healing effect on him, but also on my aunt as she was now able to share in that part of his life. Those reunions turned into some of their most memorable and fun loving/sharing times. So whether it takes three months or 40 years for our soon to be returning husbands to open up -- keep your patience and support them in every way possible (easier said than done some days), the payoff will be worth the wait. Thanks. (Editor's Note: And this is one of the reasons why I encourage everyone to get the complete names, social security numbers, and home addresses of all their buddies in Iraq, not just the ones in the own unit. Whenever they want to find them in the future, at least they will have a good starting point).

37) The best redeployment tip I can give for all spouses is to be proactive in seeking out and getting help early to deal with the return of your soldier. While the Army plans on conducting classes on both sides of the ocean for this redeployment it is essentially up to you to take the initiative to safeguard your family and your relationship. Seek help now and talk to someone, a counselor, a minister, anyone that can give you some sound, solid advice on how to deal with the wide range of emotions that you are feeling with this return. IT IS OK TO ASK FOR HELP. We so often think that we can do it on our own, but to be honest I think we are all a little terrified over this return, while it will be amazing it will also be difficult to reacquaint ourselves, especially if you have children. It will go from nothing to everything in a very short period of time. From what I have experienced with soldiers who have already come home the honeymoon phase is lasting about 2 months, then things start to get crazy. Get help when they get home and talk it all out, you may find you don't need help at all but you may find this is the one thing that has saved your relationship. What could it hurt? God bless all of you and your soldiers, and to all the Iron Ladies out there...

38) This is the first time that I'm writing to you. I read in the redeploying tips about the family that had a death in the family. We also lost a family member (my uncle). Our soldier was not one of the lucky ones to get a mid tour leave. He was upset, but I just wanted to let other family members know what he said. "I'm really sad but I'm glad that you told me. You know that I have grown up a lot since I have been gone." My advice is to remember that we as parents have sent boys/girls to war and they are now men and women. Just trust in your soldier that they can handle more than you think possible. Thank you for the updates and all of the information, as we live in an area of West Virginia that we can't get the local news. **May God Bless Our Soldiers.** Our soldier is in the National Guard with the 475th QM Co out of Beaver Falls, PA.

39) I offer a gentle reminder to those spouses whose soldiers have returned. In the midst of all your excitement and turmoil, please don't forget the friends you have made in this long year whose soldiers have not yet returned. They do not begrudge you any of your joy....but they do still need your friendship, perhaps even more so, until they also have that great day to celebrate their own soldier's homecoming. (Mother of a soldier in Iraq, watching her daughter-in-law's silent loneliness as all her friends' husbands are home but hers.)

40) Lately redeployment has been in the front of my mind, as I am sure it is in many others. There is a great deal of stuff that comes along with redeployment and just because I have done this a

couple of times before, I am not going to say that I am an expert. Honestly, no matter how many times you are doing this you never really know everything there is to know. However, this is what I have learned from my experiences:

- * EVERY family is different, therefore redeployment is going to be different for each family.
- * When you hear stories about other people coming home, don't assume that it is going to be that way with you, just remember to be open to all possibilities, good and bad.
- * Don't force things to happen. You are going to need time to adjust and so are they.
- * Go out of your way before they get home to make things perfect in the house and your surroundings. The last thing that you want to be worried about when they get home is the house work. Plus, having everything done when they get here will make the transition a little easier.
- * Last but not least - Live, be happy, and enjoy all the time that you have. Don't push, just live, and everything else will fall into place. The problem that a lot of us have made in the past is pushing for life to be normal again, and what we forget is that if we didn't push so hard, it would have happened while we weren't watching.

Congratulations ladies and gentlemen, the past year has been a rough one, and now we can look forward to the future.

41) When my husband finally gets home, it will have been three full years away in the last five on the calendar. We have been in a constant state of change. I had to quit my job about half-way through this deployment to help the kids out, so when my hubby gets back there won't be a lot of changes, everything will have changed. This one is going to be interesting. One big piece of advice to remember is one word: RELAX. No matter what it is, just relax. He is home now, don't go blow all your money right away, you'll have plenty of time to shop.

Don't spread yourselves too thin (parties, barbeques, traveling to see every relative from coast to coast) because then you will be exhausted and unable to enjoy the time you need to reunite your family.

One thing we like to do on his first weekend off after returning is to go to a nice hotel with the kids and stay for a weekend. We check in Friday and have sandwiches and chips with sodas in the room and bring the laptop so we can watch movies in the room together. We like to go to hotels with complimentary breakfasts so there is less expense. The next day we have breakfast and then go to the pool for most of the day. We order a pizza poolside and clean up later to go to a casual dinner. Sunday morning we check out and come home. This is a great way to just have "us" time. We have wonderful neighbors in our area and once they see him home, we won't have a moment's time for the four of us. We generally go to Priceline.com or Travelocity to book the room so we get great deals. We usually only pay 1/3 the regular cost for the room. Hope it helps you!

42) I too have gone through long deployments, the best advice given to me as a member of the "Wives Club" and to all Men on board the USS Indy as they returned to port, was to remember things have changed. All the kids have gotten older and more independent, they may not even remember who you are. Take it slowly. The wives are used to being both mother and father, handling everything from sports teams to discipline. Take it slowly as you move back into their lives. The wives are now used to running the house and will resent it if you the returning soldier tries to take over. Take it slowly as you move back into their lives. Wives, remember the men have not driven in a while and may be a little rusty.

43) My advice for couples re uniting, is to have no big expectations. My husband has been

deployed for the 5th time now and I found out that at first there is the honeymoon period which can be different lengths. Then there is the adjustment period. For a period of time you were both single people finding a way to do things your own way. Now you are together again and things will be different than before. Be patient and don't expect perfect harmony right away. Do not feel bad if you have friction, thinking I should be happy now that he's/she's back. Another thing, don't push your spouse, they will reveal what they want to talk about in their own time.

44) Bob, just wondering is anyone else is getting the same request from their soldier that we are - He has asked that everyone NOT come when he comes back to Fort Carson. He has consented to have his dad and I (his mom) there for the homecoming day, along with his wife of course, but has asked that we stay only one day. He says he doesn't want us to see "the war me, only the real me." His siblings (ages 7-22) are having a hard time with that idea, but I think we've been able to convince them that he has earned the right to have his wishes respected on this. Any thoughts on this? God Bless our troops, 4th ID and the USA!

Yes, I do have thoughts on this. Several have commented on this topic and I have chosen to not address it up until now, but think it's now time to do so.

Here is what one wife wrote: When my hubby came home for mid-tour leave his family came and stayed. We had no alone time to readjust. I know that the first few days for him were very overwhelming, trying to get used to the kids, the time change, and just simply being in a non-hostile environment. So my tip for redeployment would be to ask family members to hold off on their visits until your soldier can settle in. In our case we have a new child and they need time to get acquainted. Hopefully our family members are reading!!!

Another wife wrote: After our first deployment, my soldier just wanted to be at home with us for the first 3-4 days. He slept in. We were all bums with him. He didn't want to see anyone and only took a few phone calls from close family and friends. Then we took a little vacation as a family. I think it's important (if you can financially) to get away and reconnect away from your home, somehow it's less pressure because you are all experiencing something new together. When we got back, he was ready to see/deal with other people. We did not have a welcoming home party for him last time because he just wanted to come home quietly. This time he is open to the idea of a party because he received so much support that he wants to thank everybody.

From a mother: When our soldiers return home, I pray they have a welcome home like no one else has ever had. We all need to be at their duty station, if it be Ft. Sill, Ft. Carson, Ft. Lewis, Ft. Hood or where ever to show them our support and how proud we are of what they have done to help keep our freedom. As a mother of a soldier that has a wife and child I must also show my son how much I love him by being a big enough person to allow him and his family time alone. The most important thing is I see my son is home, give him a big hug and know he is okay. Once he is back with his wife and son I know he will be happy and they will see that he is well taken care of. It is a fact that my daughter in law will be much better for my son than this over protective mother. You suggested parents take care of the little ones for a few days, now I want someone to explain to me how I am going to get a 5 year old to let his daddy out of his sight for some time. (I don't have an answer to that one - but if you can do it, it gives the couple time alone to get a few days of readjustment. If not, they'll deal with it).

Now, my thoughts. Vietnam was different. Units didn't come home together, individuals came home alone. In my case, my wife met me in Kansas City and we spent several days, less than a week, alone in the KC area before making the trip home to Oklahoma. (It was during that week when I bought the new car that I warned you earlier not to do).

I understand the spouses who want time alone with their Soldier. I understand the parents and family members who want to see their Soldier the minute he/she steps off the plane. I understand the Soldier who doesn't want to hurt anyone's feelings by making a decision on the

subject.

So - each of you will have to decide what is right in your situation. One suggestion I would make is, if it fits all concerned in your extended family, let the Soldier arrive whenever they do (sometime in March/April) and you plan your trip to be there for the April 22 Welcome Home Ceremony (this applies to Fort Hood, not other posts).

If you are real strong on your desire to be there to see your Soldier when he/she arrives (as I would probably be if it were my son coming home), let me suggest you stay in a hotel/motel and not plan to stay with your Soldier and his/her spouse. Give them time in their home by themselves. Give them a hug, buy them lunch, and then give them time by themselves. You can see them a little each day you are there, but not too much. I would also suggest that you keep the trip real short - maybe one day is too short but more than a very few days is probably too long at this time.

With this said, I know that this is a very emotional topic - even members of your own family may not be able to come to agreement on the right answer. If it is right for your family to stay with your Soldier and spouse, then do it, and don't feel bad about it. I just ask that you consider all the options and the needs of the couple who have been away from each other for a year.

This is a time where we as parents have to suck it up and understand that our Soldier is a grown person with a family of his/her own and that has to take precedence over our days when they were our little boy or girl. Also remember, you don't have to squeeze the entire homecoming into the first week or month that the Soldier is home.

And as my favorite philosopher Forrest Gump says, "That's all I'm going to say about that."

45) Thank you SOOOO much for the section in your update that touches on the very sensitive subject of families coming to visit when the guys return. I had invited my mother in law to come down when my Husband gets home, but I had not thought of his feelings on the matter. I told him that I had invited his mom down and he thought about it for a few days and took matters into his own hands and called his mom and asked that she not accept my invitation. This left me feeling like the bad guy cause his mom TOTALLY understood but it still hurt cause she had her hopes set on being here. I should have thought about his feelings and discussed it with him first. So my advise to everyone before you plan a big party or invite the family all in for the big welcome home, even if ya want it to be a BIG surprise you need to let him know first and touch base with him on it and not forget he has feelings on the whole matter too.

46) Bob, I thought I'd pass on some info on the family coming to visit the soldier in the first few days of them being home we. We had our redeployment briefing last weekend and had a wonderful lady give us a whole lot of information to digest. One of her main points was to not have anyone there when the soldier returns home because of the stress that is already present. There is no need to add to that with entertaining guests, at least for the first few days. I know this is a touchy subject for a lot of people, as it was with our family, but I have spoken with my husband and he agrees no one needs to be here. So, if your stuck, just talk to your spouse and ask them what they want. A proud 1-12 wife.

47) I just wanted to share what my husband and I did during his R&R visit home to the mom who wondered how to get a 5 year old away from daddy. We have three children all under the age of 7. We had family around the entire visit with more family arriving every few days to see him. My husband loves spending time with family and his children, but he also saw the need to spend time with me. After about a week of being with the children everyday, we planned a night out that began around dinnertime. We told the children we'd see them tomorrow and to have a good night sleep. The family kept the children, put them to bed, and watched them in the morning. After we had a nice evening out to dinner, a show, and a nice hotel stay, we had breakfast and

returned home around noon. The children were excited to see us and we went on with more fun activities that included our children. We were satisfied with this special time together and were grateful our children were in good hands. Short outings while family watched the children seemed to work for us, even if it was to go out for coffee and then return home. Each family and their needs are different. This was what worked with ours.

48) This is what our family did when my son returned, and perhaps it will help others to cope. He was plucked from his unit while he was still in the midst of a mission, and although he knew that he would be leaving Iraq, he did not know the exact date. After being in Kuwait for a few days, he arrived at Ft. Carson and phoned us. We live in AZ. His wife was still in Iraq, and he was so tired and the trip back was such hassle that he just wanted some down time alone. He was met by staff and others on the post who knew he was coming in. The first call he made to me, as soon as he had had some sleep, was over an hour long. He talked about everything and the more we talked the better he sounded. I called his hotel to talk several times that day, and each time he sounded better. I REALLY wanted to be there for him, but he insisted that we not come. So we talked daily several times a day for a couple of days, and then we called and said we were coming to see him. He said definitely NOT to do so. He began to gather himself and bought a cell phone and gave us the number, so that he could be reached any time during the day. I immediately called family members and gave them the number and asked them to call. Brothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc. all kept up the calls, some daily until his wife returned to the states a month later. By this time, he had seen his buddies on post, rented an apt., and gotten belongings out of storage. His focus eventually became the preparation for his wife's return. I wanted to see him so badly, but did respect his request. He and his wife had a wonderful visit with us and his brothers, during the holidays, and all of us continue to heal from the process.

Each family will have to do what is best on an individual basis. Although it was hard at the time, responding to my son's wishes was what was best for him, and eventually, for the family. My best to all who look forward to reunions with loved ones. I may add that my late husband, my son's father, served in Vietnam, so I was somewhat familiar with the soldier returning from war situation.

49) I have something to say about the troops coming home.....when my son (who is single) lands in Fort Hood I will be there waiting for him!! I made a promise to him that I would be there...I understand the feelings the wives have...however I disagree... how the MOMs are being treated... we gave birth to these man and women... just as you wives gave birth to their children....would it hurt to share him for a day or two??? That is just how I feel.....my son is no way a Mamma's Baby but you only have one Mom in this life. I am sure a lot of people will disagree with me ...but that is just how I feel..... (Editor's Note: As I said before, this is an emotional topic and I don't want to devote a lot of space in the future to debating this. The real answer is - like they taught me in Infantry School - "it depends on the situation and the terrain". Translated, that means it's up to the soldier, wife, and parents involved - and it can be a very complex series of personalities to deal with. No one should try to answer for anyone other than their own family. BUT - the family involved, including the soldier in Iraq, should COMMUNICATE with each other, give thought to the feelings of all involved, and surely they can work out a workable answer).

50) I know you don't want to spend time on the issue of who should be there for the return of soldiers but, as I read about soldiers only wanting spouses there and no parents. I just thought, "Wow!"..... I am a wife of a soldier and I will never exclude his parents. All of the parents have gone through this emotional year just as well as the spouses. Some have even helped the spouses pull through some hard times. Like the lady said, there is only one mother in that soldier's life and she has shed her share of tears as well. Entertaining should not be on the mind of the soldiers. They didn't worry about being crowded by their parents when they were receiving packages and letters from mom and dad; and that was the only thing that kept them going out there. I just hope if you put this in your update some spouses will take into consideration the

feelings of parents. I could never leave my in laws out. They have done so much for me out of love for their son, grandkids, and me; even while they had other problems. I want to thank them for that.

(Editor's Note: This is the note I've been looking for - the note of a mature and caring wife who understands the importance of and price paid over the past year by all members of a family. If I were the parent with our son coming home, my perfect scenario would be that we would go to Fort Hood (or Fort Carson or wherever), stay in a hotel, be at the Gym when our son came in from the plane, hug and cry with him and his wife and kids, spend some time with them all, buy them lunch, then let them head home while we went back to the hotel, or to check out the central Texas highlights, with a big smile and sigh of relief. After relaxing for a few days enjoying central Texas (even parents need a break from the stress they've been through), we'd stop back and see our son and his family, buy them dinner, give them all another big hug, and then head back home with a great feeling of relief and pride in our family and what we had all accomplished together. And be prepared to support them as they move forward into their future).

And now, as that famous philosopher Forrest Gump said, "This (truly) is the last I'm going to say about that..."

51) When your soldier comes home, don't stop receiving these updates too soon. First, when something happens with the 4ID that makes the news, your soldier will be very interested in it, and may ask you about it. I recall my mother stopped listening to the news as soon as I returned to the States from Vietnam. When the 4ID (my buddies) were in a big battle a few days after I returned home, I asked my mother, who had been on top of the news for a year, what was going on. It hurt me when she said she didn't pay attention any more - her soldier was home. Now I understand that she wanted to get away from the stress and worry, but at the time I only felt like she wasn't supporting my buddies who were still in harm's way after I got home.

Another reason not to quit reading the updates too soon is that I will pass along information that may still be of interest to you and your soldier. I have no idea what it might be but there will surely be things that will be of interest for your soldier and for you about the future after Iraq. You don't necessarily need to read the whole update but you should at least take a minute or two to skim the headlines and see if there is anything in there of interest to you and your soldier. You can bet your soldier will most likely be focused on other things and will depend on you to pick up the info that may come in after their return. These updates will continue until about April 30 and then they will cease, assuming all our 4ID / TF Ironhorse troops are home as scheduled.

Importance of a Scrapbook and Memorabilia, Preparing for Future Memories

Send plenty of pictures and send them cameras (disposable) so they can send them back home and you put together a book of memories of them and their buddies so in the future they can contact one another and have reunions. My husband wishes he had done some of these things before he left Vietnam because he is still looking for some of the guys he served with in Vietnam.

3 items from January 20 update.....

I sent my son your book. You know what? Initially, he didn't think the 4th ID had distinguished themselves much, especially since they were delayed getting into Iraq and missed the initial action.; however, since he's been reading your book, he has changed his mind about the distinguished contributions of the 4th ID! (Regardless of the unit your Soldier is serving with, do your best to learn the history of that unit, make sure your Soldier understands it, and keep the books or documents as part of the memorabilia from this deployment).

A project he had me work on for him and something that kept me busy through out this deployment was creating a scrapbook for my soldier. I'm working on my 4th one through this deployment. I've divided them each into sections. I have a binder full of Babcock's emails and the Section reads: Babcock emails. Another Section reads: Pictures from Iraq (I got some nice patriotic paper from Hobby Lobby and placed the Iraq pictures on them) I bought the binders at Office Max and then got Sheet protectors and placed them in the binders to protect the pictures and all the letters. He would send me the paper off the water bottles they'd buy over there and I saved them and made a Souvenir Page: Placed those water bottle papers on the patriotic paper for the book. I created a section for my kids: Letters from Daddy & took a picture of them in their t-shirts "I support my Daddy for Iraqi Freedom" and stuck their pictures on paper for that section of the book. I made another Section that reads: Letters from Family & Friends & another Section that reads: "Letters From Socrum Elementary" of a class that wrote him for a year, my cousin's class. All his letters meant the world to him and he wanted me to save each letter and each card for his book. I put everything by date in the binders. The first 3 are so thick, full of letters from my husband to me and me to him and to our kids. Our kids pictures they made him are there.

Good advice came from you, Bob - get addresses - I sent him an address book.

So the first recommendation I would make is for the deploying divisions to find a volunteer to provide the same service for them as you have for us (4ID Updates from Iraq). It has made all the difference.

Start a scrapbook with pictures sent home, clippings about your unit, and newsletters from the unit.

Get the CD that you are offering with the 4ID Updates from Iraq.

Find a good central place to store the letters, news clippings, pictures, and other memorabilia, even if you don't have time to put it in a scrapbook. Don't take a risk of losing these precious memories.

Dealing with the Media

Most of you will not have to deal directly with the media during your Soldier's deployment, but some of you will. You should all be prepared if you are put into that situation, either planned or on the spur of the moment, when you haven't had any time to think about it, prepare yourself, or get any coaching on dealing with the media. The media may be your hometown newspaper or TV station or it could be the national media. It could be to discuss your feelings about the job your Soldier is doing, it could be to discuss a breaking news event, or it could be dealing with a tragedy, either one of your own or of one of our fellow soldiers.

Freedom of speech is one thing that all Soldiers are proud to fight for. No Soldier ever wants to take away your rights to Freedom of Speech. However, as a spouse, family member, or friend of an American Soldier, you should always think through how what you are saying will reflect on your Soldier and the profession he or she has chosen to dedicate him/herself to and risk his/her life for. Complaining to the media seldom solves a problem – but it does reflect on you, your Soldier, and your Soldier's unit.

Frustrations, misunderstandings, disappointments, and uncertainties are parts of any job or profession. Most of these are best handled by talking it over with your closest friends and confidants and not letting it get to the media. Just as you wouldn't go to the media with your frustrations about your own job, the same holds doubly true with frustrations you have with your Soldier's job.

Keep in mind, our enemies watch American news and if it speaks negatively about our military and our Soldiers, it gives them more hope and more resolve to hold on a little longer and see if we Americans will walk away from what we have started. Many countries question our national resolve. They think that we Americans aren't tough enough to stick with what we started. I don't believe you want to feed into that and potentially prolong the will of our enemies, and at the same time prolong and increase the danger to our Soldiers.

With that said, here are some words of advice in dealing with the media:

If in doubt, don't say it to the media.

If you don't have anything positive to say about our Soldiers and their involvement in Iraq or Afghanistan, you probably should keep those thoughts to yourself.

I've learned you don't get the whole or real truth from the media.

People/organizations that I expected to support us and our Soldier son didn't. Some of them can't/don't want to deal with it, so they don't.

Support that we did get, came from others. It was appreciated and I always made sure to thank them for their support and asking about my son.

During that time, my eyes and ears were glued to CNN as I listened to the pros and cons of the possible conflict. And each day brought more bad news of soldier casualties. There were many folks who had lots of opinions about what was right and wrong about the war. Some even used the war to promote themselves. **My position was not one of politics, but of support to the troops.**

Be extremely careful when dealing with reporters. **Understand their motives, assume they will use anything you say, you are never "off the record" with them.** There are some great

and supportive reporters, there are also those who are only interested in using your comments out of context to prove a negative point they want to make about the military.

We have documented situations where active duty Army spouses, thinking they were dealing with an honest reporter with supportive motives, were totally quoted out of context and were sick to their stomach with how the article was printed. And once it is printed, if your letter of protest is printed at all, it is probably in a back page that does not make the headlines that the original story did. The damage is already done.

We were a family devastated by the death of a 19 year old in Vietnam. We are very anti-military. Truth is, I begged my son to walk off that army base. I wanted to join the protesters, until I came face to face with them one day. I felt such pain that my son was in terrible danger and they were holding signs on a street corner. It felt like a slap in the face. From that I learned:

- * To truly love the American Flag
- * The importance of showing respect when the Star Spangled Banner is sung.
- * How much I love my country.
- * How for the first time, I realize the military is not just a big machine, but it has a face, the young men and women who sacrifice their lives for all of us.

We have become very patriotic. I am so proud of my son.

If anyone gets a "public inquiry" (i.e. - someone asks you a question that you don't know if you should answer) about just about anything including troop movements and soldier injuries.....refer that person to hotline below. The best choice if asked your opinion or other info on troop movements, etc... is "No Comment" -- this includes family members. The media also has a habit of asking for your thoughts or feelings on one issue or another to get a story. PLEASE keep in mind that what you say could be plastered all over the TV. Let's all support our **soldiers** even if you personally don't agree with Army policy.

There have been instances in the past of reporters casing the military quarters such as "Pershing Park" that are easier to access than the main installation looking for a story. THEY ARE NOT ALLOWED TO DO THIS. It is a violation of military regulations and THEY KNOW IT. If this happens to you, just say "no comment" and call the MP's.

We all want our Soldiers home safely.

The Army's Public Information "Hot Line" is 1-800-833-6622.

Editor's Note: I will gladly admit that the majority of this section was written by me. I have had some very positive dealings with the press over the past year, and have helped some of our spouses and family members deal with the very negative impact of reporters who reported something other than what the intent of the military family member was trying to get across. My caution to anyone reading this is to always be cautious and watch your words when talking to a reporter. If you can't be positive, it is to your Soldier's advantage if you would keep your opinion out of the media. That's not naïve, that's looking out for the safety of your Soldier and all our Soldiers around the world.

Financial Considerations

The tough things in the bills department are handling the car insurance and license renewals including driver's license and car plates. Many services can be stopped and the others dropped to minimal balances, but often these cannot be paid in advance nor renewed from afar easily. When the soldiers return, the last thing they need is to deal with government red tape on top of putting their lives back in order.

Try to get soldiers to invest rather than spend their \$\$ they make there. They will appreciate having something to show for their time over there.

My family, including my 84-year-old father sent checks on a regular basis to help with the purchases for care packages and the postage.

The best thing I did was open a "Savings Account" Take most of the extra Money from checking and put into Savings. Don't make bills. Make sure your husband opens up an E/MSS account. That's how I get his LES off the computer.

I was unable to fix an allotment that was wrong on my son's pay, because I just had the Power of Attorney, but not the "Special Power of Attorney", which is the actual name for the document required to deal with pay issues. JAG does the document, but you have to ask for it. Since the allotment was \$1000 too much to a savings plan, it was a big error that needed to be corrected so I could pay his bills. He had started an allotment to the Savings Deposit Program for deployed soldiers (which offers 10% interest and was a great way to save for a house deposit when he gets back). It ended up he had to fix it with payroll in Iraq, which was a little difficult as he had to get the time to go to Camp Warhorse and deal with it, plus back then we did not have internet as we do now, which makes it a lot easier to deal with these kind of issues. I could have used the Red Cross to tell him, but felt I did not want him scared about something happening at home with a Red Cross message, so Rear Detachment got a message to him to deal with it. Thank you Rear Detachment!!

Don't forget that combat pay, family separation pay, and other special pay in Iraq or Afghanistan will come to an end when your soldier returns to the States. And, taxes will resume. Don't get used to the extra pay and become so dependent on it that you have financial problems when your Soldier returns to the more normal pay structure. A savings account for the extra money will be there for things you and your Soldier want to do when he/she returns home.

Advise your soldier to bring as many \$1 U.S. bills as he can. Anything larger in the Iraq economic market is a problem when buying anything.

Editor's Note: There are a few points that I feel strongly about and want to make along the way. Having gone through the redeployment process after my year in Vietnam, there is nothing I've put in the updates the past couple of weeks that I don't agree with (if I don't agree with a suggestion, I just don't publish it). Now it's time for one of my strong recommendations.

I've often said, if I were President of the United States, I'd pass a law that didn't allow service members to make large dollar expenditures for the first 30 days after their return from a combat zone. Foolishly, I traded a perfectly good 1965 Mustang (with 35,000 miles on it and almost paid for) in the summer of 1967 for a fancy new Chevrolet Caprice that I couldn't afford. My sole reason for doing it was that the Mustang wasn't air conditioned and I didn't want to ride around in the summer in a car that wasn't air conditioned after spending a year in the heat of Vietnam. For the next several years, I struggled with car payments that I couldn't afford.

After a year of not focusing on finances, our soldiers (at least I was guilty of it) have lost

perspective of the value of money to a certain extent. So - if you agree with me, you can save this recommendation and show it to your soldier when he/she wants to spend big money within the first month of arrival back home.

I highly recommend you give it at least 30 days to let reality settle back in, let the reality of the loss of special combat pay get back into the family budget, and save yourself many months of digging out of a financial bind that you could get yourself in to. Take it from a guy who carried the scars of a bad financial decision for several years as I went through my mid 20's.